

Distant Drums:

The British Commonwealth and the Approach of War,

1 October 1938 - 11 September 1939

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This thesis has been composed by the candidate; the work is the candidate's own, and the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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ABSTRACT

While there has been much coverage of the influence of the British Commonwealth on the Chamberlain government's foreign policy, there has been little on the impact of European events on the dominions themselves, especially relating to the particular contexts in which they existed. Yet it is these contexts which were crucial in determining how they perceived events in Europe. This study therefore aims to consider the developing attitudes of the Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, and South African governments towards the idea of war with Germany between the Munich Settlement and Canada's declaration of war on Germany on 10 September 1939. The Irish Free State is deliberately excluded from consideration, as its circumstances were sufficiently distinct from those of the other dominions to render its inclusion meaningless, and there was consequently never any realistic prospect that it would enter the war at Britain's side, as the others did. The first chapter of this thesis examines the underlying imperatives which defined the dominions' perspectives on Europe, while succeeding ones trace the effect of the key developments in the approach of war, such as *Kristallnacht* and the march into Prague, on the Commonwealth's evolving views of the international situation during the eleven months after Munich. The methodology follows the Agents & Structures model laid down in M. G. Fry's 1999 article 'The British Dominions & the Munich Crisis.' Sources for this study include dominion government records, the personal diaries of participants, their private correspondence & newspaper coverage of their activities, as well as the secondary literature dealing with the wider picture of the prelude to war and the Commonwealth's role within that, as outlined above.

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INTRODUCTION

Aim

As will be seen, much has been written about the prelude to war from the British perspective. Much has also been written about the influence of the British Commonwealth, on that viewpoint. This material is therefore fairly familiar. The aim of this thesis, however, is to look at this subject in a different way, by tracing the impact of European events on the thinking of the Commonwealth governments, between the Munich Agreement and the outbreak of war. This thesis does not purport to be the true history of relations between the periphery and centre of the Commonwealth in this period; it simply aims to be a true history.¹ In this, it is an unashamedly elite history; it focuses on the elite politicians who formed the 'inner cabinets' that monopolised power in these political entities, and seeks to trace how developments in Europe affected their mindsets. In particular, no attempt is made at reconstructing public opinion. In New Zealand, any attempt to do so from the press would lead the reader to believe that the public was convinced of the intellectual bankruptcy of the Labour government's manifesto, and would throw them out of office in the general election on 15 October in 1938. In fact, Labour was returned with three fewer seats than in their landslide victory of 1935, and with an increased share of the vote.² All this is not to say that such a project would be impossible, only very difficult, and it is not attempted here.

The British Commonwealth in 1938 was something of an amorphous body. The term itself had originally been coined to apply to Britain and the self-governing dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa.³ Of the other dominions, Newfoundland had been placed under direct British rule, and Eire would demonstrate its independence by remaining aloof from the Second World War, so it is this original definition that will be used throughout this thesis.⁴ All except Eire were kingdoms ruled by a common crown. The latter, officially added to the group since 1922, had signified its independent tendencies by replacing the monarchy with an elected president in 1937. The legal question of the

¹ John M. Mackenzie, 'Review of *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa since the Boer War* by Ronald Hyam; Peter Henshaw' in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (2004), pp. 472-473.

² See Chapter One, below.

³ D. C. Somervell, & H. Harvey, *The British Empire and Commonwealth*, (London, 1954), p. 346.

⁴ P. N. S. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of External Policy, 1931 - 1939*, (London, 1952) (hereafter Mansergh, *Survey*) p. 17; for a more detailed consideration of the nature of the British Commonwealth, see Chapter One, below.

divisibility of the crown that obsessed constitutional experts elsewhere therefore lacked relevance here. Politically, Eire was also unique in not containing any substantial constituency in favour of the British connection. While Irish trading links with Britain remained necessarily close, their political significance was overshadowed by the course of recent history. This effectively rendered fighting a war at Britain's side, except in self-defence, a political impossibility, even if the ruling party in Dublin had had any appetite to do so. Eire also remained an emigrant, rather than immigrant, nation, unlike the others. Dublin was moving far beyond what the other dominions had achieved and sought at this time. Other than its communication with London via the Dominions', rather than Foreign, Office, Eire therefore more closely resembled an independent state than an integral part of the British Commonwealth. Consequently it makes more sense to exclude it from an examination of this crucial stage in the development of these entities, with which it had little in common apart from its titular membership of their group. Newfoundland was also a dominion in name only, having being brought under London's direct rule due to financial difficulties. Attention will instead be focused on Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, each of which had a government capable of forming and expressing an opinion on their behalf. These governments, while still heavily reliant on British intelligence, nevertheless had their own independent mechanisms for collating and framing their opinions, quite distinct from those of the British Government. Each had a Department of External Affairs, responsible for originating policy with regard to the rest of the world, and each had a nascent diplomatic representation capable of putting their own gloss on developments.

Historiography

Early historical consideration of the prelude to war tended to overlook the Commonwealth. Mainstream opinion, as expressed by such authorities as Sir Lewis Namier and John Wheeler-Bennett, followed the 'guilty men' thesis, blaming the pre-war British leadership for not stopping Hitler soon enough.⁵ The primary focus was therefore on showing where British policy had gone wrong in its dealings with Hitler, leading to the 'unnecessary war,' as Churchill put it, and not on why Britain had pursued that policy.⁶ This appeared to have a

⁵ L. Namier *Diplomatic Prelude, 1938-1939*, (London, 1948) and J. Wheeler-Bennett *Munich: Prologue to Tragedy*, (London, 1948); Foot, M., Howard, P., and Owen F., as 'Cato', *Guilty Men*, (London, 1940)

⁶ W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, (6 vols., 1948-54) vol.1, p.14 as cited in D. Reynolds 'Churchill's Writing of History: Appeasement, Autobiography and "The Gathering Storm"' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Ser., Vol.11 (2001), p.222

strong contemporary resonance for that particular period of the Cold War when Western statesmen saw themselves as once again confronting potential aggressors, as both David Reynolds and Anthony D'Agostino indicate.⁷ This line of inquiry provided little incentive to examine the Commonwealth's involvement in the diplomatic antecedents of the war, as the crucial errors lay in Britain's central relationship with Germany, not its peripheral ones with the Commonwealth. Study of the Commonwealth was therefore irrelevant as it could not identify why the choices made were the wrong choices, even if it could explain why those choices were the ones made. All this was, however, based on the assumption that British policy had simply been wrong from start to finish.

An emerging revisionist school of thought, however, sought to question this assumption. A plethora of memoirs from the survivors of the Chamberlain Cabinet, such as Halifax and Templewood, had suggested that concern for imperial unity had, in fact, been central to the reasoning behind appeasement.⁸ Accordingly, D. C. Watt turned to this subject in his 1958 essay 'The Influence of the Commonwealth on British Foreign Policy: the Case of the Munich Crisis.'⁹ This concluded that the dominions' attitude was 'of great importance in explaining the rigidity of the British determination not to get involved in central Europe,' although he also acknowledged that this was 'only one of the factors which went to make up the policy of appeasement.'¹⁰ Additionally, Watt accepted that limitations were placed on this field of study by the paucity of official documents that had been released on this subject matter up to that point.¹¹ Further motivation for exploring this area was provided by A. J. P. Taylor's 1961 *Origins of the Second World War* and D. C. Watt's own 1965 article 'Appeasement: The Rise of a Revisionist School?'. Taylor did not himself mention the Commonwealth, but, his characterisation of Munich as 'a triumph for all that was best and most enlightened in British Life' was not only provocative and controversial: but also by questioning the assumption that British policy had been wrong, it legitimised the re-examination of the reasoning behind that policy.¹² Watt then continued his engagement with

⁷ Ibid., pp.246-7; A. D'Agostino 'The Revisionist Tradition in European Diplomatic History' in *Journal of the Historical Society* (2004) Vol. IV (2), pp. 257-9

⁸ See, for instance, Edward Wood, Earl of Halifax, *Fulness [sic] of Days*, (London, 1957) pp. 197-198 & 205; Samuel Hoare, Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years*, (London, 1954), pp. 323-6 & 353.

⁹ D. C. Watt, 'The Influence of the Commonwealth on British Foreign Policy: the Case of the Munich Crisis' reprinted in D. C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century*, (London, 1965), pp.159-174

¹⁰ Ibid., p.173

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 159-160.

¹² A. J. P. Taylor, *Origins of the Second World War*, (London, 1964) p.189.

the role of the dominions in 1963 with his article, 'Imperial Defence and Imperial Foreign Policy, 1911 – 1939: The Substance and the Shadow', concluding (somewhat speculatively) that 'in March 1939 Dominion opinion reacted as positively to Hitler's entry into Prague as did that of Britain itself.'¹³ He returned to this subject area in 1967 with his essay 'South African Attempts to Mediate between Britain and Germany, 1935-1938', in which he again concluded that dominion activity had 'a considerable influence on the policy of attempting a new initiative to secure a general satisfaction of German claims in Eastern Europe' but that the South African attempts at mediation 'were both futile in conception and perilous in practice.'¹⁴

Julian Campbell Doherty's '*Die Dominions und die britische Aussenpolitik von München bis Kriegsausbruch*' took advantage of the release of British (but not dominion) official documents under the thirty year rule at the end of the 1960s, which none of the preceding works had been able to do, and concluded not so much 'that the dominions had influenced British policy as England was still able to strongly influence the far-flung countries of the Commonwealth,' although their behaviour was also 'not as much determined by loyalty to the mother country, as by their own regional interests,' without elaborating on how this came to be so.¹⁵ Nor did he appraise different strands of opinion (such as the disparities between Mackenzie King and Skelton, for instance, who were given equal weight as the voice of Canada) within the dominions.¹⁶ This article was followed by Ritchie Ovendale's *Appeasement and the English Speaking World: Britain, the United States, the Dominions and the Policy of 'Appeasement'*¹⁷ (1975). This is a slightly odd book, as the bracketing of the United States with the self-governing dominions, simply because it was an English speaking country, feels somewhat artificial. It is true that a degree of isolationism pertained in all of these countries, except New Zealand, but the wealth, industrial might and population of the United States meant that the Anglo-American relationship was not only conducted through a different mechanism (the Foreign, as opposed to Dominions' Office), but was on a completely different level. More than 160 years of independence from Britain served only to

¹³ D. C. Watt, 'Imperial Defence and Imperial Foreign Policy, 1911 – 1939: The Substance and the Shadow' reprinted in Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, 139 – 158.

¹⁴ D. C. Watt, 'South African Attempts to Mediate between Britain and Germany, 1935-1938' in K. Bourne and D. C. Watt (Eds.), *Studies in International History: Essays presented to W. Norton Medlicott, Stevenson Professor of International History*, (London, 1967) pp. 402-422.

¹⁵ Doherty, J. C., '*Die Dominions und die britische Aussenpolitik von München bis Kriegsausbruch*' (tr. M. Klinker) in *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Vol.XX (1970), p.234.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.219 & pp.209 - 234

¹⁷ Ovendale, R., '*Appeasement' and the English Speaking World: Britain, the United States, the Dominions and the Policy of 'Appeasement'*, 1937-1939, (Cardiff, 1975)

exacerbate this difference. The book remains a useful and in-depth examination of dominion influence on British policy, however. In the end the author absolves the dominions of responsibility for 'appeasement' (even though all except New Zealand enthusiastically endorsed it) on the grounds that Chamberlain had already decided to proceed with this policy prior to the Imperial Conference of 1937 where Australia, Canada and South Africa lobbied for 'appeasement' or something very like it. Ovendale returned to the subject in 1983 when he wrote 'Britain, the Dominions and the Coming of the Second World War' in which he reached a similar conclusion, albeit one somewhat qualified by the stipulation that 'over Czechoslovakia Chamberlain saw the reluctance of the dominions to fight and the consequent break-up of the Commonwealth as decisive.'¹⁸ He continued to argue that dominion influence declined after this, particularly with the occupation of Prague.¹⁹ Reinhardt Meyers has similarly argued 'the dominions' role was a subsidiary and supportive one rather than one of taking the initiative.'²⁰ He further contended that appeasement had older origins than is usually thought, and that it was particularly driven by the insoluble dilemma of maintaining power in Europe and the Far East simultaneously.²¹ This is a position with which Paul Kennedy essentially concurred in his 1976 essay 'The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy 1865 – 1939.'²² D. Carlton returned to the question of dominion influence in 'The Dominions and the Gathering Storm', concluding that 'British Ministers, in war no less than in peace, gave representations from the Dominions a high priority only when they agreed with them.'²³

More recently, R. A. C. Parker devoted a chapter to the United States and the dominions in *Chamberlain and Appeasement* (1993). Parker follows Ovendale in concluding 'the Dominions had little or no influence on British policy except in supplying added justification

¹⁸ Ovendale, R., 'Britain, the Dominions and the Coming of the Second World War' in Mommsen, W. J. And Kettenacker, L. (eds.), *The Fascist Challenge and The Policy of Appeasement* (London, 1983), p.333

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.335

²⁰ R. Meyers, 'Die Dominions und die britische Europapolitik der dreissige Jahre' in Hutter, J. et al (eds.) *Tradition und Neubeginn, Internationale Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*, (Cologne, 1975), pp.173 – 201, and 'Britain, Europe and the Dominions in the 1930s. Some Aspects of British, European and Commonwealth Policies' *Australian Journal of Politics and History* Vol.22 (1976) pp.36 -50, as cited in R. Meyers, 'British Imperial Interests and the Policy of Appeasement' in Mommsen and Kettenacker, (eds.), *Fascist Challenge*, p. 339.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

²² P. Kennedy, 'The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy, 1865 – 1939', in *British Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 2 (1976), pp.195 - 215

²³ D. Carlton, 'The Dominions and the Gathering Storm' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.6 (1977-78) No.2, p.175

to policies that Chamberlain and his supporters would have wished to pursue anyway.²⁴ M. G. Fry's 1999 article, 'Agents and Structures: The Dominions and the Munich Crisis, September 1938'²⁵ criticised dominion complacency: 'but to the self-delusion, the sheer wrong-headedness of dominion beliefs had been added, however briefly, utterly futile expectations of appeasement and the Munich agreement.'²⁶ The author, however, moved away from previous commentators by casting doubt on even South Africa's will to remain neutral in 1938.²⁷ Even if Fry's latter argument is correct, this still leaves open the question of how dominion illusions fared down to September 1939. Although Andrew Stewart in *Empire Lost: Britain, the Dominions and the Second World War* (2008) mentioned dominion disquiet over the change in British policy initiated after Prague, concluding the Canadian Prime Minister in particular was resentful over the lack of consultation involved (a position this thesis seeks to refute), the author did not otherwise seek to track the impact of European actions on dominion governments in this period.²⁸ This work instead focused on the Dominions' Office effort to develop a policy document to deal with the possibility of one or more dominions remaining neutral in the event of war, and accordingly traced the development of this memorandum within Whitehall from December 1937 to May 1939, before turning to address the crisis over neutrality that arose in South Africa during the first four days of September 1939.²⁹ The author returned to the latter in his article of August of the same year, 'The British Government and the South African Neutrality Crisis,' which traces the origins of the crisis back to the Boer war, but fails to explain why a South African government consensus in favour of participation in a war against any further instance of German aggression in April 1939, should have transformed itself into a cabinet split over involvement in such a war in September of that year.³⁰

Historians of the Commonwealth have looked on the advent of the Second World War from a different perspective. War had not even broken out by the time H. V. Hodson wrote 'British Foreign Policy and the Dominions' for the July 1939 edition of *Foreign Affairs*. He concluded that Britain and the Dominions were 'physically and morally' unprepared for war

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

²⁵ M. G. Fry 'Agents and Structures: The Dominions and the Czechoslovak Crisis, September 1938' in *Diplomacy and Statecraft* Vol. 10: 2&3 (1999) pp.293-341

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

²⁸ A. Stewart, *Empire Lost: Britain, the Dominions and the Second World War*, (London, 2008), pp.19 & 20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-24.

³⁰ A. Stewart, "The British Government and the South African Neutrality Crisis, 1938-39," *English Historical Review* Vol. CXXIII No. 503 (August 2008), pp. 947-72, 958 & 962.

in 1938, but that lessons had been learned, namely that the dominions needed to prepare both individually and collectively for war.³¹ Naturally enough, given the circumstances of the time, he did not elaborate on what steps were being taken as a result of these lessons learned. This was followed in 1943 by *The British Commonwealth at War*, edited by W.Y. Elliot and H. Duncan-Hall. This was supposed to be a response to pro-German propaganda in the United States, but appears to have been targeted at a rather specialist audience as it concentrates fairly heavily on the constitutional and economic organisation of the war effort. Beyond recognising (and criticising) Irish and *Afrikaner* reluctance to become involved, there is little of substance on pre-war politics.³² In 1947, G. Carter produced *The British Commonwealth and International Security*, which suffers from the paucity of documents then available, leading her to conclude that the 1937 Imperial Conference united the participants in an awareness of a common danger so that 'for the first time in the inter-war period, the motive of self-preservation acted directly on the governments of the overseas Dominions to induce a common attitude.'³³ This was a position which later releases of official documents were to undermine.

P. N. S. Mansergh completed his *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of External Policy, 1931-1939* in 1952, returning to the subject in *The Commonwealth Experience* in 1969 (with a revised two volume edition issued in 1982). When Professor Mansergh began his studies of the Commonwealth, it appeared that that institution might prove to be of continuing importance in world affairs.³⁴ His first work therefore addressed the difficulties of devising an appropriate framework to reconcile British interests, the perpetuation of the Commonwealth, and dominion aspirations for their own external policies, which appeared to be of long-term significance, rather than examining the actual issues which required a Commonwealth response, which had already been dealt with at the time of writing, and consequently seemed of passing concern. His second work dealt with all aspects of Commonwealth development, not just external relations, but did address the question of responding to Hitler. On appeasement, he came to a similar conclusion to Ovendale that, while the dominions approved of the policy, they bore no responsibility for it.³⁵ He also

³¹ H. V. Hodson 'British Foreign Policy and the Dominions' in *Foreign Affairs*, XVII (July 1939), P. 159.

³² W. Y. Eliot 'Introduction', pp.4 - 5 in W. Y. Eliot and H. Duncan-Hall (Eds.) *The British Commonwealth at War*, (New York, 1943, reprinted 1971); *Ibid.*, pp.475-483 and pp.426-437.

³³ Carter G., *The British Commonwealth and International Security: The Role of the Dominions, 1919-1939*, (Toronto, 1947), p.279.

³⁴ D. K. Fieldhouse 'Untitled Review' in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 94, No. 372, (July, 1979), p. 606.

³⁵ P. N. S. Mansergh., *The Commonwealth Experience*, (London, 1982), p. 86.

noted 'a new Commonwealth consensus on resistance.... following close upon the old Commonwealth consensus on appeasement,' but without explaining how or why that new consensus developed.³⁶ In between Mansergh's books, in 1958 J.D.B. Miller brought out *The Commonwealth and the World*, which concluded that dominion responsibility for British policy 'is a matter which need not be gone into here.'³⁷ Further, while the author acknowledged Irish and South African dissent, he confined himself simply to noting that 'by the time Britain declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, Dominion opinion was much more settled.'³⁸ More recent entrants to the field, such as David McIntyre and Peter Lyon have been more interested in developments outside the self-governing dominions and the field of international relations on which this project focuses.³⁹

The national histories of the individual dominions (such as *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord*, *A History of South Africa*, *The History of New Zealand*, and *A History of Australia*) naturally cover the pre-war period, but focus on their own viewpoints with no attempt to consider a comparative perspective.⁴⁰ Nor, given the greater scope of their subject, do they have the luxury of being able to consider this period in any great depth. Similarly, biographies of the participants are concerned with all aspects of their subject's life over its entire course, of which this is but one episode of limited significance, which has necessarily to be considered primarily from a personal perspective. Thus, while the approach of war merited only a single sentence in Keith Sinclair's *Walter Nash* (1976), Lita-Rose Betcherman made it a central strand of three chapters of *Ernest Lapointe: Mackenzie King's Great Quebec Lieutenant* (2002).⁴¹ In neither case, however, did the authors need to refer to a Commonwealth dimension to adequately dispose of the matter in terms of their subjects' lives.

More specialist works have tended to focus on a single aspect of the crises considered here, and often over a longer period than that under review. Thus, E. Andrews's *Isolationism and*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³⁷ J. D. B. Miller *The Commonwealth and the World*, (London, 1958) p. 44.

³⁸ *Idem.*

³⁹ W. D. McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact 1869-1971*, (Oxford, 1977) as cited in Fieldhouse D. K., 'Untitled Review,' pp. 606-608; P. Lyon, 'Untitled Review' in *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs), Vol. 59, No. 4. (Autumn, 1983), p. 725.

⁴⁰ J. H. Thompson with A. Seagar, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord*, (Toronto, 1985); L. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, (Yale, 2004); T. Brooking, *The History of New Zealand*, (Westport, 2004); C. M. H. Clark *A History of Australia*, (Abridged Cathcart, M.), (London, 1995).

⁴¹ Keith Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, (Dunedin, 1976), p. 189 (hereafter Sinclair, *Nash*); Lita-Rose Betcherman, *Ernest Lapointe: Mackenzie King's Great Quebec Lieutenant*, (Toronto, 2002), (hereafter Betcherman, *Lapointe*).

Appeasement in Australia: Reactions to the European Crises, 1935-1939 (1970) is concerned exclusively with how international developments were reported in the Australian press between Mussolini's assault on Abyssinia and the outbreak of the Second World War.⁴² Similarly, R. Citino's *Germany and the Union of South Africa in the Nazi Period* (1991) avoided South African sources, relying instead on the German Foreign Office files, thereby restricting the author in the insight he could provide on the Union perspective on events. As with the two preceding titles, such works are also usually confined to a single dominion rather than all of them. Alan Watt's *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy: 1938-1965* (1967) is therefore unusual in that it addressed the perspectives of all the dominions at the time of Munich, but even it does not examine how European events impacted on these thereafter.⁴³ More typical in this respect was J. Crawford and J. Watson's 2010 article 'The Most Appeasing Line: New Zealand & Nazi Germany, 1935-40' in dealing with a single country. The article itself, however, was unusual in arguing that Wellington could be found among the appeasers, at least in the case of Germany; the general consensus being that New Zealand consistently opposed appeasement.⁴⁴ Likewise, works such as *Canada in World Affairs: The Pre-War Years* (1941), *In Defence of Canada: Appeasement and Rearmament* (1965), and the *History of Canadian External Relations* (1966) naturally focus on the Canadian context at the expense of the Commonwealth dimension.⁴⁵

Within the dominions, the approach of war has therefore attracted interest, both in terms of national development and more specialist areas. The evolving nature of dominion status within the Commonwealth also remained popular, as long as that body continued to appear relevant in terms of world politics. Likewise, since the initial suggestion that Britain only adopted appeasement to preserve the unity of the Commonwealth, substantial coverage has been given to assessing the extent of the influence of dominion views on British decision-making over Germany during Neville Chamberlain's premiership. The reverse question has, however, been relatively neglected. This thesis will therefore seek to examine how European events affected the evolution of dominion perspectives, in a Commonwealth, rather than national, context, between 1 October 1938 and 11 September 1939.

⁴² E. Andrews, *Isolationism and Appeasement in Australia: Reactions to the European Crises, 1935-1939*, (Canberra, 1970).

⁴³ A. Watt, *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge, 1967), p. 27.

⁴⁴ J. Crawford, & J. Watson, 'The Most Appeasing Line: New Zealand & Nazi Germany, 1935-40' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.38 (2010) No.1, pp. 75-97.

⁴⁵ F. H. Soward et al. *Canada in World Affairs: The Pre-War Years*, (London, 1941); J. Eayrs *In Defence of Canada: Appeasement and Rearmament*, (Toronto, 1965); G. P de T. Glazebrook, *A History of Canadian External Relations*, Vol. 2, 'In the Empire and the World, 1914-1939,' (Toronto, 1966).

Sources and Structure

Unfortunately none of the dominion governments kept cabinet minutes the way the British government did, so another way had to be found to determine how each of the governing elites reacted to events in Europe. Canada was run as virtually a partnership between the Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, and his deputy Ernest Lapointe.⁴⁶ The most useful resource for what they were thinking is Mackenzie King's diary, in which he recorded what he saw as the most important events of the day, together with his interpretation of them, which has now been digitised. His diary was generally written up at the latest within a couple of days, and appears to be reasonably accurate as record of events. For instance, his descriptions of despatches received correspond with those held on file by the Canadian Department of External Affairs. His interpretations require a more critical approach, however, as he was often guilty of wishful thinking. For example, he convinced himself in January 1939 that he had persuaded Lapointe of the merits of defining the government's position in advance on the question of war.⁴⁷ This interpretation is challenged by the diary of Dr. Oliver Skelton, the permanent head of the Department of External Affairs, which is held with his papers at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, and which records a contemporary visit by Lapointe, during which Lapointe makes clear his disagreement with the Prime Minister.⁴⁸ Regrettably, Lapointe kept no diary and this was the last entry in Skelton's rather sporadic record, but alternative sources, such as the British High Commissioner's reports home (held at the National Archives in Kew) provide a separate perspective on developments.

Similarly, the two most important leaders in South Africa were the Prime Minister, General Hertzog, and his deputy, General Smuts.⁴⁹ Neither of these kept a diary, but Smuts maintained a very revealing private correspondence with his friends, the Gilletts, which serves as a reasonable substitute, at least with regards to the way his mind was working. Hertzog, however, was less forthcoming, and his views had to be

⁴⁶ See Chapter One, below.

⁴⁷ See Chapter Four, below.

⁴⁸ *Idem*.

⁴⁹ See Chapter One, below.

reconstructed from his official correspondence with South Africa's representatives in Berlin and London, as well as the British government. All of these sources are held at the National Archives of South Africa in Pretoria. The biography of General Hertzog by Oswald Pirow, his Minister of Defence during this period, is extremely self-serving and needs to be treated with great caution. The papers of the British High Commissioner to South Africa, Sir William Clark, and the Governor General, Sir Patrick Duncan, provided a useful supplement to these records and are located at the University of Capetown.

New Zealand was instead run by a triumvirate of politicians, the Prime Minister, Joe Savage, his deputy, Peter Fraser, and the Minister of Finance, Walter Nash. None of these were diarists or assiduous correspondents, so alternative sources had to be located. The most useful of these was the correspondence between the Prime Minister and Bill Jordan, New Zealand's High Commissioner in London. As Labour Party stalwarts, they shared confidences, which are absent from the government to government correspondence, which is nonetheless very helpful in indicating what was of concern to the New Zealand government. Both of these records are at the National Archives of New Zealand, in Wellington. Another valuable resource was the series of interviews of surviving contemporaries conducted by Mark King and Mark Bassett for their biography of Peter Fraser, in the National Library of New Zealand, also in Wellington.

Australia was beset by a leadership crisis during this period, and external affairs was one of the issues the leading politicians used to distinguish themselves from each other.⁵⁰ Brief cabinet minutes were kept, indicating what had been discussed and what had been decided, but not what arguments had been used. These provided a starting point for at least seeing what subjects were of concern to the government. Further insight was also obtained from the correspondence between Canberra, the British government, the Australian High Commissioner, and the Australian Liaison Officer in London. All of these records are held at the National Archives in Canberra. The National Library of Australia stored the papers of the Prime Minister, Joe Lyons, his wife, Dame Enid Lyons, his temporary successor, Sir Earle Page, his ultimate successor, Bob Menzies, Lyons's Secretary for External Affairs, Billy Hughes, and Menzies's corresponding minister, Sir Henry Gullett, as well. Sadly, none of

⁵⁰ See Chapter One, below.

these preserved their diaries for this period, but some of the correspondence was very informative.

The most useful work encountered early in the project was Fry's 1999 article on the dominions and appeasement. While it was primarily concerned with the influence the dominions had on Britain, rather than on the impact European events had on the former, it indicated that the dominion governments were under the control of small elite groups within their respective cabinets, and identified the membership of these for Australia, Canada and South Africa.⁵¹ An examination of the New Zealand Dictionary of National Biography online also showed this to be true of politics there, as well.⁵² This implied that it could be profitable to initially consider the question of the impact of European developments on dominion policy from the personal viewpoints of the members of these factions, as this would help to elucidate the reasoning behind their decisions. The model used there, of active agents operating within a set of existing structures, is therefore also the one that has been used here.

Chapter one therefore seeks to identify and analyse those structural elements which constrained the dominions in this period. The remainder of the thesis, chapters two to six, each identify a particular event, or series of events, and seeks to trace its impact on the thinking of the dominion elites. Chapter two examines the effect the Munich Agreement had on dominion attitudes, by looking at their treatment of the Czechs, their perception of a need for continuing investment in defence, and their willingness to be flexible over the former German colonies that they had acquired mandates over. Many Commentators consider that *Kristallnacht* marked a sea-change in British views of Germany, and chapter three extends this consideration to the dominions, focusing on their subsequent treatment of refugees and continuing defence requirements. Chapter four contemplates the internal debates inspired by 'the war scare' of January 1939, which continued on into March of that year. Hitler's march into Prague and its repercussions; the British guarantee of Poland, the Italian seizure of Albania, and the consequent guarantees for Greece, Romania and Turkey are the subject of

⁵¹ Fry, 'Agents and Structures' pp. 296 – 8.

⁵² See Gustafson, Barry. 'Savage, Michael Joseph 1872 - 1940.' *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>, Gustafson, Barry. 'Nash, Walter 1882 - 1968.' *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 /URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>, Beaglehole, Tim. 'Fraser, Peter 1884 - 1950.' *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 /URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>, and Olssen, Erik. 'Lee, John Alfred Alexander 1891 - 1982.' *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 /URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

chapter five. Chapter six focuses on the diplomatic attempts to co-opt Russia for the western powers and to find a peaceful solution to the Polish crisis. The conclusion then draws all these together to assess the influence of European events on the way the dominion leaders viewed the approach of war in this period.

1: UNDERLYING IMPERATIVES:

THE CONSTRAINTS UNDERPINNING DOMINION BEHAVIOUR IN 1938 - 1939

The British Commonwealth was neither properly an empire, a federation, nor an alliance. An empire implies central direction, and London had formally conceded this principle with regard to the dominions by the passage of the Statute of Westminster in 1931.¹ A federation would have required a central decision-making body to formulate policy reflecting the various interests of its constituent members, but Canada, Eire and South Africa were opposed to this as it would limit their sovereignty.² An alliance would not require such a body, but it still would have necessitated a clear exposition of the rights and obligations of members with regard to one another, which would likewise have placed limitations on the freedom of dominion parliaments to decide their stance 'in light of all the prevailing circumstances', as Mackenzie King liked to put it, and would therefore have proved equally unacceptable.

Bill Jordan, the New Zealand representative to London and Geneva, provided a more intricate definition of the Commonwealth in a private conversation with the Yugoslav ambassador, which he then reported home on 26 May 1939:

We are separate countries, except of course that we are bound together by ties of loyalty and in any difficulty we are absolutely together: but that in matters of detail, such as we were dealing with at Geneva, the Government of each country took the line of action it thought best.³

Even this cumbersome description does not quite indicate the full complexity of the situation. Jordan was anxious to play up the basic unity of the Commonwealth, as he was firstly trying to explain the situation to a foreign representative (and hence would not have wanted to let the side down) and then using that explanation to provide his Prime Minister with ammunition against newspaper criticism that, as the High Commissioner put it later on

¹ J. Darwin, 'A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics' in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol. IV, The Twentieth Century*, Brown, M. J. & Louis, R. (eds.) (Oxford, 1999), p. 69.

² P. N. S. Mansergh *Survey* p. 63.

³ National Archives of New Zealand, hereafter NANZ, PM/16/39+correspondence/Jordan to Savage, 26 May 1939.

in the same letter, 'New Zealand is making it awkward for Great Britain.'⁴ In fact, all of his assertions need to be subjected to further qualification to give a more complete picture of the situation. The Statute of Westminster might support the contention that the dominions were separate countries, but Australia and New Zealand (desiring, as Carl Berendsen, the head of the Prime Minister's office in New Zealand, wrote in his unpublished memoirs, 'no independence, either theoretical or practical') had as yet found no reason to implement it.⁵

Imperialists also mounted a rearguard defence, arguing that the Statute did not apply to the Crown which remained indivisible, so that if the King was at war anywhere, he was at war everywhere, which would place a significant limitation on the practical extent of dominion independence.⁶ Their opponents refuted this view, arguing that the Statute of Westminster rendered the Crown divisible, and that the King could be simultaneously at war and at peace with a particular other party in regard to his different dominions.⁷ This question remained open down to the outbreak of war, when the political imperatives at play in each dominion rather than constitutional niceties, determined the stance adopted by each government, as will be seen. Practical considerations, arising out of the disparity in resources available for diplomacy and defence, also placed restrictions on the extent to which the dominions could conduct policy independently. Nonetheless, they all possessed the basic mechanisms (cabinets, parliaments, and departments for external affairs) for formulating, determining, approving and executing policy. Therefore, while not entirely separate, they were also far from being completely dependent, and the stances they adopted arose out of their own unique perspectives, rather than an uncritical acceptance of British pronouncements, hence providing an alternative viewpoint for the events of 1938 – 1939. Likewise, the assertions that the Commonwealth was: 'bound together by ties of loyalty', and 'absolutely together' in facing 'any difficulty' merit some qualification. As will become apparent, *Afrikaners*, *Quebecois* and the Irish, in Australia as much as in Eire, could scarcely be described as being over-burdened with sentimental ties to Britain, a consequent tendency to identify Britain's problems as their own, or any resultant sense of obligation to contribute towards the latter's resolution, and these groups often carried considerable political weight in their respective dominions.

⁴ *Idem*.

⁵ National Library of New Zealand, hereafter NLNZ, McIntosh Papers/MS-Papers-6759-456/Berendsen, C.A. *Reminiscences of an Ambassador*, (Unpublished Autobiography), Book II, p. 35; Mansergh, *Survey*, p. 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Jordan's analysis ties in with the contemporary convention of describing the Commonwealth as a family of nations.⁸ They were not quite separate ('a new species of the dependent state known as "the part-sovereign state"', as Loring Christie, of the Canadian Department of External Affairs, complained), but were rather tied to each other in a loose and ill-defined manner, and their mutual commitment was not as strong and clear-cut as Jordan wished to imply.⁹ As with many families, the rights and obligations of membership were not and (for reasons that will become apparent) could not be spelled out, as this would highlight the fault-lines that interested parties preferred to leave unexposed. Unfortunately for the dominions, 'reason and co-operation were not the pass-words of the Third Reich' and Adolf Hitler cared nothing for this, with the result that his foreign policy would create a situation where the dominions would be forced to confront and resolve these issues.¹⁰ Their reactions would be determined by the interaction of imperatives drawn from the political landscape they inhabited together with the personal idiosyncrasies of their governing elites.

Each dominion was affected in its approach to international relations both by factors that were common to all, and ones that were unique to their own particular circumstances. All were dependent on Britain, economically, politically and militarily, although to varying extents, and bore this dependence with equally varying degrees of good grace. By and large they shared a common attitude to the Versailles Settlement, and even, to some extent, what to do about it. All were implicitly (and in South Africa's case, explicitly) influenced by the issue of race. Furthermore, as Michael Fry points out, each was dominated by a small elite, although these elites displayed varying levels of cohesiveness; from the virtual unanimity of the triumvirate in New Zealand (although this unanimity was only displayed in the context of vigorous assaults from all directions) through the tensions of the Mackenzie King government in Canada, to the brittleness of the coalition in Australia and the Fusion experiment in South Africa, which would both tear themselves apart within the year.¹¹ Products of different political landscapes, these elites each viewed events through unique, if often parochial, perspectives, and produced responses which were conditioned by the defining parameters of their domestic political realities

⁸ See, for instance, Meyers, 'Britain, Europe and the Dominions,' p. 36.

⁹ L. Christie as cited in *Christie Papers*/Folder 107 as cited in J. A. Munro, 'Loring Christie and Canadian External Relations, 1935 – 1939' in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol.7 (1972), pp. 32 – 3.

¹⁰ Glazebrook, *Canadian External Affairs*, p. 129.

¹¹ Fry 'Agents and Structures,' p. 296.

The New Zealand Government was presided over by a 'triumvirate' of Labour politicians: Michael (Joe) Savage, Peter Fraser and Walter Nash.¹² Between them, they controlled all the important portfolios and dominated their colleagues. Like most Dominion Prime Ministers, Savage combined the portfolio for External Affairs (as the dominions invariably styled their nascent Foreign Offices) with that of Prime Minister.¹³ Professional support for these roles was provided by Carl August Berendsen (the head of the Prime Minister's Office and the embryonic Department for External Affairs) assisted as deputy by Alister McIntosh in Wellington, and in London by Bill Jordan as High Commissioner, with Sir Cecil Day as Liaison Officer for External Affairs.¹⁴ The second member of the triumvirate, Peter Fraser, held a number of portfolios, most importantly those of Health, Education, Justice and Deputy Prime Minister, standing in for Savage as Acting Prime Minister during the latter's increasing absences due to the cancer that was killing him (leaving Fraser "the natural successor" on Savage's eventual death in March 1940).¹⁵ The last member, Walter Nash, dominated the finance function through the portfolios for Finance and Customs, which also gave him responsibility for immigration and housing.¹⁶ He would have to wait for Fraser's death and the end of the National Party interregnum before becoming New Zealand's third Labour Prime Minister in his turn. Between them then, these three men were to preside over the Labour Party for three decades from 1933 to 1963.¹⁷

Labour's domestic priorities in 1938-39 were firstly to implement a welfare state and secondly to maintain fiscal stability, hence this strategic allocation of responsibilities ensured the triumvirate could control the political agenda in cabinet.¹⁸ The triumvirate also ensured

¹² See, for instance, J. A., Lee, *The John A. Lee Diaries 1936 – 1940*, (Christchurch, 1981), pp. 96 & 112; NLNZ, *Bassett Papers*2(|MS000-094-05), folder 13, interview of Sir Carl Berendsen by Mark King, p. 1.

¹³ B. Gustafson, *Cradle to the Grave*, (Auckland, 1988), p. 178 (Hereafter Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*).

¹⁴ NLNZ, *Bassett Papers*/2000-094-02/interview of Sir Alister McIntosh by Professor John Roberts 20/3/78 (subsequently edited by McIntosh), p. 9; Templeton, Malcolm. 'Jordan, William Joseph 1879 - 1959.' *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 /URL:

<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>; Cambridge University Library/Royal Commonwealth Society Library Online/Scrapbooks of Sir Cecil Day

<http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F0115%2FRCMS+303>.

¹⁵ Beaglehole, 'Fraser,' URL: <http://www.dnb.govt.nz/>; Bassett, & King, *Fraser*, p. 162; NANZ, Nash/1177/0351.

¹⁶ Gustafson, 'Nash,' URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>.

¹⁷ Respectively, Gustafson, 'Savage,' URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>; Gustafson, 'Nash,' URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>.

¹⁸ See below, pp. 20 - 23.

that that body remained pliant by promoting yes-men to it, regardless of experience or ability, and sidelining or subordinating potential troublemakers. A good example of the former was Fred Jones at Defence. This was an acutely sensitive position because of the increasingly tense international situation, and because the triumvirate, due to their anti-war activities during the First World War, lacked credibility when dealing with it (as the veteran and war-hero Jack Lee was not slow to point out).¹⁹ Jones likewise had no first-hand knowledge of defence issues and was therefore unlikely to challenge the triumvirate on the issue, even if the downside to this cosy little arrangement was that defence did not receive adequate representation at cabinet level during a time of grave international danger – ‘a most irresponsible thing to have done’, as McIntosh later recalled.²⁰ Likewise, the triumvirate had relieved themselves of the problem of Bill Jordan, who was notoriously difficult to work with.²¹ As a member of the ‘Old Guard’ he could not be entirely overlooked when it came to sharing out the spoils of victory after the 1935 election, but the triumvirate did not want him in cabinet, and overcame the problem by exiling him to London as High Commissioner, being, as McIntosh put it, when he was being interviewed by the historian Mark King for Fraser’s biography, ‘prepared to pay a pretty high price to be rid of him.’²² Jack Lee, another Labour stalwart, was divisive in a different sense. Lee was the most important Labour politician outside the triumvirate itself. He was a charismatic and aggressive MP on the left of the Party who had built up a following through his writing and broadcasting and would use this to challenge the leadership after Labour’s victory in the general election on 15 October 1938. While Jordan’s problems were purely personal, Lee’s espousal of a more radical agenda coupled with his undoubted ability and appetite for confrontation, rendered him a more formidable opponent; one who would require careful handling. The triumvirate therefore sought to tame him by giving him the Housing portfolio, which provided him with the kind of role he craved, but denied him cabinet status and placed him under first Savage’s, and then Nash’s thumb – at least to the extent that Jack Lee could ever be under someone else’s thumb.²³ These twin strategies threatened to hand this small clique complete control over the machinery of government, something which grew less and less palatable to Jack Lee and Caucus (the term used to refer to the Parliamentary Labour Party meeting in

¹⁹ J. A. Lee, *Diaries.*, p. 92, & p. 104.

²⁰ *Idem*, p. 92; NLNZ, *Bassett Papers*/2000-094-02/interview of Sir Alister McIntosh by Mark King 6 April 1978, p. 11.

²¹ See NLNZ, *Bassett Papers*/2000-094-13/ interview of Sir Carl Berendsen by Mark King, p. 13; *Ibid.*, interview of Sir George Laking by Mark King 14 August 1986, p. 24 & interview of Sir Alister McIntosh by Mark King 6 April 1978, p. 4.

²² Sir Alister McIntosh as cited in NLNZ, *Bassett Papers*/2000-094-02/interview of Sir Alister McIntosh by Mark King 26 April 1978, p. 3.

²³ J. A. Lee, *Diaries.*, 1 October 1938, p. 93; Erik. Olssen, ‘Lee,’ URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>.

committee).²⁴ These divisions, however, did not emerge until after the October 1938 general election, and the concomitant need for public unity were safely in the past. In September 1938, the triumvirate's strategies still seemed to be working and the party appeared relatively united behind its leadership.

They were not, however, in politics just for the sake of achieving, and keeping, office. Office was simply a means to the end of implementing their objectives, chiefly the establishment of a system of social security in New Zealand. These aims were themselves products of the triumvirates' backgrounds, and it is worth looking at these in a little more detail, in order to have a fuller picture of the factors generating their reactions and responses to the news from Europe. They had all migrated to New Zealand prior to the First World War and had been involved in various degrees of opposition to that conflict. This allowed veterans (like Jack Lee) to dismiss them as "C.O.s" (Conscientious Objectors) and, as noted above, made defence something of a sensitive issue.²⁵ Their socialism also informed their view of international affairs: ascribing the incidence of wars solely to economic tensions (as Savage put it in his home town newspaper: 'a country did not go to war for the love of it, there were always economic problems as the cause') and producing a touching faith in the efficacy of international conferences for the dissipation of these.²⁶ While a shared commitment to a common agenda united them, at least in public, they were from very different backgrounds and were, in many ways, a surprising group to find themselves in charge of New Zealand.

Although Savage was an Australian of Ulster Catholic extraction, who had become a union activist, he found little difficulty in reconciling himself to the New Zealand custom of being 'more English than the English.' He was later to declare that 'when Britain is in trouble, we are in trouble.'²⁷ He was already suffering from the cancer that would eventually kill him, and had refused treatment to enable him campaign for Labour in the 1938 election.²⁸ Berendsen considered that Savage 'ruled his cabinet,'²⁹ but McIntosh, instead saw Savage as both uninterested, at least with regard to External Affairs, participating little in discussions, and also inclined to 'sweep [*sic*] whole thing [the international situation] under the carpet,' a

²⁴ J. A. Lee, *Diaries*, 21 October 1938, pp. 95 – 96.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

²⁶ Savage, M. J., as cited in the *Benalla Standard*, 19 January 1939 as cited in Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, p. 250; see also section below on common factors.

²⁷ Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, p. 250.

²⁸ Gustafson, 'Savage,' URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>.

²⁹ NLNZ, *Bassett Papers*/2000-094-05/folder 13, interview of Sir Carl Berendsen by Mark King 8 January 1971, p. 17.

view more in accord with Jack Lee's depiction of Savage as a 'weakling' and 'incompetent.' On balance, Berendsen's view seems more likely to be correct: he worked more closely with Savage than McIntosh, and therefore had greater opportunity for observing his methods and gauging their effectiveness, while Jack Lee had personal reason to seek to belittle Savage whenever he could. During the First World War, Savage had campaigned against conscription, on the grounds that wealth should be conscripted before men.³⁰ This opposition to war was not merely doctrinal, but rooted in a deep aversion to the suffering and bloodshed it caused. When, for instance, in January 1940, he was asked to admire the view of the country's expeditionary force departing for Europe, a friend recalled, he declined, explaining that it had been hard enough having to participate in the recruitment campaign and then order them abroad, so that he could not bear now to watch them going to their deaths.³¹ He was not, however, an out and out pacifist, and therefore lay somewhere between Fraser and Nash on this issue.³²

Peter Fraser had been born in Scotland, and was also a trade unionist who had moved away from his religion (although in his case this had been Scottish Presbyterianism rather than Irish Catholicism), but he nevertheless retained a strong puritanical streak, as well as a fascination with funerals.³³ Despite being Minister for Education, his own education had been somewhat limited, and this perhaps led to his aversion to conducting business in writing, as well as a resentment against those better educated than himself, and whom he suspected of believing themselves his superior, such as Berendsen, with whom he had a famously poor relationship.³⁴ McIntosh, with his self-deprecating humour, was, when he succeeded Berendsen, during the war, however, able to establish a good working relationship with Fraser, then Prime Minister.³⁵ The latter was also the closest of the triumvirate to Lee, the leader of the party's radical dissidents. This was based on a mutual respect between two hard men who had no sympathy for any kind of weakness, with matters only coming to a final breach between them in November 1939. Fraser had also expressed admiration for Lee as a writer, which undoubtedly appealed to the latter's extensive vanity.³⁶ This may,

³⁰ Gustafson, 'Savage,' URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>..

³¹ Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, p. 254.

³² *Idem*, pp. 90 & 204.

³³ Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, p. 271.

³⁴ Beaglehole, 'Fraser,' URL: <http://www.dnb.govt.nz/>; Sir Alister McIntosh, 'Working with Peter Fraser in Wartime' in *Peter Fraser: Master Politician*, Clark, M., (Ed.) (Dunmore, 1998) p. 160(hereafter *Fraser*, Clark (Ed.)); NLNZ, *Bassett Papers/2000-094-02/* interview of Noel Pharazyn & Alister McIntosh by Mark King. 13 July 1978, p. 36.

³⁵ NLNZ, *Bassett Papers/2000-094-13/* interview of Sir Carl Berendsen by Mark King 8 January 1971, p. 15.

³⁶ M. Bassett, & M. King, *Fraser*, pp. 129 – 130.

however, have merely been an example of the skilful diplomacy Fraser was perfectly capable of, for example in his dealings with the British Medical Association over the introduction of maternity services (of which more below), where the doctors preferred to deal with this former sailor, rather than the impeccably middle-class Walter Nash, and also in his relations with the Maori (he quipped that they preferred no from him rather than a yes from his predecessor, Frank Langstone, an assertion which, rather surprisingly, appears to be borne out by the personal correspondence of one of the leading Maori, Princess Te Puea).³⁷ Fraser had also been the most active campaigner of the three against participation in the First World War, being imprisoned in 1917.³⁸ Despite this, his opposition to war was more pragmatic than the other two: he had opposed World War One as an imperialist war, nothing else, and had no difficulty with the idea of using force in a just war.³⁹

Nash was a very different sort, a middle-class accountant from Kidderminster whose Christian beliefs had attracted him to socialism.⁴⁰ He opposed the First World War on pacifist principle and supported complete disarmament in its aftermath.⁴¹ Unlike Fraser, and even Savage, he had been a pacifist out of conviction, and only the threat Hitler presented reconciled him to the idea of going to war.⁴² As an accountant, his selection as Minister for Finance had been something of a foregone conclusion for a party that scarcely attracted 'the brightest and best' from financial circles. His decision making skills, however, left even more to be desired than Fraser's, as the latter when tracked down could usually be relied on to make a decision, while Nash was just as inaccessible, and also inclined to procrastinate once he had finally been brought to ground, both in sharp contrast to Savage who was credited with being both professional and decisive in his methods.⁴³

There may have been tensions within the group (it has been reported that Savage took Fraser for granted, but lavished attention on Nash, while Fraser does not seem to have liked Nash particularly, and availed himself of an early opportunity to relieve the latter of the Finance

³⁷ Sinclair, *Nash*, pp. 162 – 3; Princess Te Kirihaehae Te Puea Herangi, (Te Puea) as cited in NLNZ, *Bassett Papers*/2000-094-02/interview of Sir Alister McIntosh by Mark King 16 March 1978, p. 23.

³⁸ D. Grant., 'Anti-Conscription, Conscription & the Referendum' in *Fraser*, Clark, (Ed.) p. 132.

³⁹ McIntosh, Sir Alister, 'Working with Fraser' in *Fraser*, Clark (Ed.), p. 165.

⁴⁰ Gustafson, 'Nash,' URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>.

⁴¹ Sinclair, *Nash*, pp. 39 – 40; Gustafson, 'Nash,' URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>.

⁴² Grant, 'the Referendum' in *Fraser*, Clark (Ed.), p. 133; W. Nash, 'Address to the Empire Parliamentary Association, Westminster; as cited in C. MacKenzie, *Walter Nash: Pioneer & Prophet*, (Palmerston North, 1975), p. 71.

⁴³ McIntosh, Sir Alister, 'Peter Fraser – Warrior Prime Minister' in *Fraser*, Clark (Ed.), p. 162; NLNZ, *Bassett Papers* 2000-94-02/interview of Sir Alister McIntosh by Mark King 13 July 1978, p. 35; NLNZ, *Bassett Papers*/2000-094-13/ interview of Sir Carl Berendsen by Mark King 8 January 1971, p. 17.

portfolio and exile him to Washington).⁴⁴ Nevertheless, they presented a united front in this period against all comers and comers were scarcely lacking in 1938/39.

The first problem they faced was being re-elected on the 15 October 1938, after Parliament had been dissolved on 16 September. There had been some concern that New Zealand's "Moral Foreign Policy" would prove to be an issue and Berendsen had drawn up a memorandum to defend the Government's record.⁴⁵ Jordan had likewise provided a very defensive account of his activities in London and Geneva for the triumvirate's use.⁴⁶ The basis of this policy might be summed up as the Covenant, the whole Covenant and nothing but the Covenant (of the League of Nations) as 'unless the principles of the Covenant survive our civilization will perish, and will deserve to.'⁴⁷ There was also an element of enlightened self-interest to this, as was publicly acknowledged: 'New Zealand was a small and vulnerable country, said Savage, whose vulnerability and distance from Britain made collective security and world peace absolute necessities.'⁴⁸ Collective security was therefore both an insurance against any limitations of British power as well a moral stance. Although New Zealand was famously 'more English than the English' and, according to Berendsen, 'wanted no independence, theoretical or practical,' this policy would, by creating a web of new obligations wholly outwith the Commonwealth, also have inevitably served to move New Zealand in that direction.⁴⁹ This drift was only exacerbated by the fact that New Zealand's policy was quite obviously not the policy of the rest of the Commonwealth, and collective security had, even before Munich, put New Zealand at odds with Britain's attempts (with Australia's backing) to achieve an understanding with Mussolini, a happenstance which had previously attracted press criticism in New Zealand, as Jordan mentioned in the report referred to above.⁵⁰ This letter and Berendsen's memorandum therefore seem likely to have been efforts to forestall any attempts by the opposition to depict the government as being disloyal to Britain during the election. In point of fact, however, the National Party, with the unanimous support of the press, had instead chosen to

⁴⁴ NLNZ, *Bassett Papers*/2000-094-02/interview of Sir Alister McIntosh by Mark King 16 March 1978, p. 14; NLNZ, *Bassett Papers*/2000-094-05/folder 13, interview of Sir Carl Berendsen by Mark King 8 January 1971, p. 13.

⁴⁵ NANZ, EA/1/58.8.1pt 1a-ExtrnlRelGen/undated memo by Berendsen, pp. 5,7,8 & 9.

⁴⁶ NANZ, PM/16/1/pre-39 Savage, Fraser & Jordan correspondence/Letter from Jordan to Savage, 13 September 1938, p. 2.

⁴⁷ NANZ, EA/1/58.8.1pt 1a-ExtrnlRelGen/undated memo by Berendsen, p. 9

⁴⁸ M. J. S. Savage, as cited in *Dunedin Star*, 14/8/37, as cited in Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, p. 209.

⁴⁹ NLNZ, McIntosh Papers/MS-Papers-6759-456/Berendsen, C.A. *Reminiscences of an Ambassador*, (Unpublished Autobiography), Book II, p. 35.

⁵⁰ National Archives Australia (hereafter NAA)/CP103/17/Bundle 7NN/Speeches/Notes on 'Permanent Bases of Australian Foreign Policy' by Col. Hodgson; NANZ, PM/16/1/Pre-39 Savage, Fraser & Jordan correspondence/Letter from Jordan to Savage, 13 September 1938, p. 2.

focus on the potential financial consequences of Labour's welfare reforms, so these documents were not much needed at the time. Ministers were, thus obliged to focus their attention on Southland, rather than the Sudetenland, and this, together with Jordan's absence on League of Nations business in Geneva, helps to explain why New Zealand provided London with rather less advice than the other dominions during the crisis.⁵¹

In the end Labour won the election with a slightly reduced majority (down from 55 to 53 seats) although with an increased share of the vote.⁵² The stage was now set for Jack Lee to deliver his onslaught on the triumvirate in what would become known as 'the Jack Lee Affair.' The press had tried to make his *Socialism in New Zealand*, published during the election, an issue during the campaign, although ultimately to no avail.⁵³ A former delinquent, he had been decorated and lost an arm during the First World War, giving him far greater credibility on defence matters than the conscientious objectors who ran the government. He also benefited from being a native New Zealander, in contrast to the triumvirate, who, as previously mentioned, were all immigrants (Savage, for instance, suffered from a persistent rumour that he was in fact Michael Josephus Savitchovich, a Czech who had not even been naturalised, an accusation which simply could not have been made against Lee).⁵⁴ His entry in the Dictionary of National Biography indicates that he expected to be rewarded with the Defence portfolio, but his diary is careful to leave this implicit, rather than explicit, merely noting: 'there are twenty returned men whose experience is at least equivalent to Cabinet, men whose intelligence is not necessarily inferior' and '[I] prefer housing if there is a job to do,' although later 'defence would do.'⁵⁵ His complaints against the triumvirate were both personal ('Three years ago Savage did an unfair thing when he selected a Cabinet, a High Commissioner, a Speaker, a Chairman of Committees, two Whips, an Administrator of Samoa and left me in the cold') and political.⁵⁶ Politically, he seems to have been antagonised initially by his perception of Walter Nash as both timid and incompetent ('Nash's hopelessness and helplessness') in his handling of the financial aspects of government policy, and to have hit upon the idea of using Caucus, which he dominated, to elect Cabinet and thereby control policy, an approach which brought him politically as well as personally into conflict with Savage.⁵⁷ Fraser is likewise castigated in

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1; See Ch. 2.

⁵² Gustafson, 'Savage,' URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>.

⁵³ M. Bassett, & M. King, *Fraser*, p. 166.

⁵⁴ Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, p. 218.

⁵⁵ J. A. Lee, *Diaries*, pp. 92, 125 & 163.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 98 & 100.

Lee's diary for his timidity and obstructionism, but usually only in connection with the other two.⁵⁸

Accordingly, when Caucus met on 3 November 1938, Lee presented a motion that the former should elect Cabinet and after a stormy meeting this was passed by 26 to 23.⁵⁹ Savage refused to accept this decision and referred the whole matter to Conference. The National Executive, fearing the damage this was doing Labour, intervened, forcing a compromise by which the leader would have to seek Caucus's endorsement of his team prior to an election, meaning that Savage would continue to be the sole arbiter of Cabinet membership for the next two years.⁶⁰ In the meantime, exasperated with what he saw as the triumvirate's financial mismanagement, Lee had produced the infamous 'Lee Letter', a trenchant criticism of the triumvirate (particularly Nash) and their policies, which emerged into the public domain, supposedly against its author's wishes, and exposed the extent of Labour's civil war to the light of day.⁶¹ Conference could not ignore this, but also compromised by first censuring Lee, and then electing him to the National Executive. This did nothing to resolve the underlying issues, and Lee almost immediately began to organise for the next conference, which he hoped would prove more amenable. The matter would only finally be resolved with his expulsion from the Labour Party in 1940, after the publication of 'Psycho-pathology in Politics' (a vitriolic attack on Savage's leadership) and the response of the dying, bedridden Savage to Conference, citing Lee as the reason why 'for about the last two years my life has been a living hell.'⁶²

Even if this was somewhat exaggerated for the purpose of emotionally manipulating Conference, as Barry Gustafson suggests, dealing with Jack Lee cost Savage and the other members of the triumvirate time and emotional resilience, resources of which they had only a finite quantity.⁶³ The Social Security Act, which passed into law on 13 September 1938,⁶⁴ but which, as an electoral ploy, was not due to come into force until 1 April 1939, would likewise draw on these resources.⁶⁵ This was Labour's flagship legislation, providing a

⁵⁸ *Idem.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁶⁰ Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, pp. 234 – 5.

⁶¹ J. A. Lee, *Diaries*, 5 December 1938, p. 112.

⁶² J. A. Lee, 'Psycho-pathology in Politics' in *Tomorrow*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 6 December 1939, pp. 75 – 7, as cited in M. Bassett, & M. King, *Fraser*, p. 180; Savage, M. J. S., as cited in *Standard*, 2/5/1940, as cited in Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, p. 267.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

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⁶⁵ M. Bassett, & M. King, *Fraser*, (Auckland, 2000), p. 151; Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, pp. 223.

comprehensive system of social welfare to the New Zealand public for the first time in its history. The doctors, however, had yet to agree to new contracts under the scheme, and negotiations between Labour, led by Fraser and Nash, and the New Zealand branch of the British Medical Association quickly bogged down over the issue of maternity services, with the result that less than 3% of doctors had signed contracts with the government for this service by the due date of 1 April 1939.⁶⁶ This led to an intemperate intervention by the terminally ill Savage, in which, with great insensitivity, he threatened to break what he characterised as industrial action by the B.M.A. through the importation of desperate refugee doctors from Germany and Austria.⁶⁷ This does appear, however, to have broken the log-jam, although negotiations over maternity services were only, in fact, concluded after Hitler had invaded Poland.⁶⁸ Discussions then moved on to general practice services and it was not until 1941 that the provisions of the 1938 Act (that had been due on 1st April 1939) were actually finally implemented.⁶⁹

Finance was likewise to devour much of the triumvirate's time and effort in 1938–39. New Zealand's sterling funds had been declining since Labour came to power, and began truly to haemorrhage during 1938.⁷⁰ Nash (belatedly and reluctantly, according to Lee) introduced exchange controls as a remedy on 6 December 1938. Nash described these measures as being necessary to preserve New Zealand's sterling balances and indicated that they were only temporary, while Savage depicted them as being part of a broader, long-term strategy to promote secondary industry in New Zealand, and shield the economy from future fluctuations in the outside world. The reality is almost certainly that they were both trying to prevent panic, but had different audiences in mind: Savage's picture of a well-planned autarkic economy was meant to impress core socialist support that the government was in control of the situation; while Nash's characterisation of exchange controls as a temporary measure would have been intended to minimise adverse reaction among already jittery financial circles. Neither argument much impressed Malcolm MacDonald, the British Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs from 31 October 1938 to 29 January 1939, who warned Jordan (and which the latter duly reported to Wellington on 14 December 1938) that if New Zealand breached the Ottawa Accords, the United Kingdom Government was likely to come under pressure to retaliate against them, which they could ill-afford given their

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁶⁹ *Idem.*

⁷⁰ Sinclair, *Nash*, p. 170.

overwhelming dependency on the United Kingdom market.⁷¹ Jordan was left desperately trying to square the circle to MacDonald, arguing that exchange controls would correct the problem of New Zealand's disappearing funds, without impacting on British exports to New Zealand. In the end, Britain did not retaliate, but much-needed goodwill had been eroded.

Goodwill was required because New Zealand faced another fiscal problem: a series of government loans were due to mature over the coming years, commencing in 1939. The government, already committed to an expensive social security policy and with much reduced sterling funds, was clearly in no position to repay these and therefore needed to raise fresh loans. Walter Nash was accordingly despatched to London, leaving the desperately ill Savage in charge of Finance, as well as his own portfolios of Prime Minister and External Affairs.⁷² The market was not receptive. The Deputy Governor of the Bank of England had already informed Jordan that a fresh loan for New Zealand was 'out of the question' even at high interest rates, which Jordan attributed to the active campaign he saw waged everywhere by vested interests to undermine the economic credibility of New Zealand and its government.⁷³ In reality, there is no need to seek an explanation for the bleak prospects for fresh loans in any such campaign; the circumstances of 1938–39 were quite sufficient to render New Zealand's position extremely difficult, if not impossible. First there was the international situation, where the prospect of war was depressing the markets, rendering it difficult for anyone to raise fresh funds (80% of a recent Australian issue had been left in the hands of the underwriters, for instance).⁷⁴ Secondly, as noted by Sir Thomas Inskip, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs from 29 January 1939, there was the policy of the British Government, which was trying to garner support for loans to potential allies, thereby increasing the competition chasing already scarce funds.⁷⁵ Finally, there were New Zealand's domestic policies themselves. These flew in the face of prevailing orthodoxy, and the prevailingly orthodox, who controlled the funds available for investment, were unsurprisingly reluctant to back policies which they saw as unlikely to succeed, and whose only chance of success they deemed likely to be at the expense of the investors funding

⁷¹ M. MacDonald, as cited in NANZ, PM/16/1/pre-39 Savage, Fraser & Jordan correspondence/Letter from Jordan to Savage, 14 December 1938.

⁷² B. Gustafson, *Cradle to the Grave*, (Auckland, 1988), p. 245.

⁷³ NANZ, PM/16/39+correspondence/Letter from Jordan to Prime Minister, 20 April 1939; NANZ, PM/16/1/pre-39 Savage, Fraser & Jordan correspondence/Letter from Jordan to Savage 30 December 1938, & NANZ, PM/16/39+correspondence/Letter from Jordan to Prime Minister, 27 February 1939.

⁷⁴ J. A. Lee, *Diaries*, 8 June 1939, p. 158; TNA DO35/765/Note by Sir Frederick Phillips, 6 June 1939 as cited in Sinclair, *Nash*, p. 179.

⁷⁵ The British National Archives at Kew, hereafter TNA CAB 23/100/Minutes, 21 June 1939 as cited in Sinclair, *Nash*, p. 179.

them.⁷⁶ This situation can scarcely have been helped by Jack Lee's implied threat to repudiate New Zealand's overseas debt.⁷⁷ Walter Nash accordingly cooled his heels for several weeks, before being made the first of a series of loan offers that would prove unacceptable to him and his colleagues.⁷⁸ Only after Chamberlain personally intervened did negotiations begin in earnest, and only after Montague Norman, the Governor of the Bank of England, employed much arm-twisting, did these eventually produce acceptable, if arduous, terms, allowing Nash to return to New Zealand on 5th September 1939, more than four months after he had left.⁷⁹

Thus, distracted by intra-party dissent, financial woes and the efforts involved in implementing a social security system in the teeth of vociferous resistance from vested interests, the triumvirate had little time to devote to external affairs. Their 'Moral Foreign Policy' was dead in the water. Its time might come again, but for the moment self-interest was to be the order of the day.⁸⁰ This meant backing Britain. New Zealand's security was dependent on London's Singapore strategy, which, while failing to inspire complete confidence, was preferable to the alternative of an impossible self-defence.⁸¹ Furthermore, their need to raise new finance tied them even closer not just to Britain, but its government of the day, as ultimately the triumvirate's ability to implement their policies would rest not only on Britain's survival, but on the goodwill of the Chamberlain government in arm-twisting the City to let them have their loans. New Zealand therefore had little room for manoeuvre in 1938–39.

Unique Factors: Australia

Australia began the period governed by a coalition between the United Australia Party (hereafter U.A.P.) and its junior partner, the Country Party. Michael Fry argued in his 1999 article 'Agents and Structures: The Dominions and the Czechoslovak Crisis, September 1938' that the most significant members of this governing elite in September 1938 were the Prime Minister, Joe Lyons, the Treasurer, Richard Casey, the Country Party leader, Sir Earle

⁷⁶ See Sinclair, *Nash*, pp. 175 – 7 for an account of British reactions to New Zealand's need for finance.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁷⁸ Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, pp. 245 – 7.

⁷⁹ See Sinclair, *Nash*, pp. 178 – 189.

⁸⁰ NANZ, EA/1/85.1.1pt1-DefofNZGen/85/1/1 part 1/Memo by Berendsen, 14 October 1938.

⁸¹ NANZ, Nash/1262WarPrep/Report of New Zealand Chiefs of Staff, 4 April 1939, p. 1; NANZ, EA/1/85.1.1pt1-DefofNZGen/85/1/1 part 1/Memo by Berendsen, 14 October 1938; NANZ, Nash/1262WarPrep/Report of New Zealand Chiefs of Staff, October 1938, pp. 1 – 7.

Page, the Attorney-General, Bob Menzies, and the Minister for External Affairs, Billy Hughes.⁸² There seems little reason to argue with this. Certainly, T. W. White, the only candidate from outside this inner circle to stand for the U.A.P. leadership after Lyons's death on 7 April 1939, resigned from the government on 8 November 1938 due to his exclusion from this 'coterie.'⁸³ They were assisted in their deliberations on external affairs by Stanley Bruce, the High Commissioner in London, whose role was supplemented by the appointment of Alfred Stirling (Menzies's former secretary) as Liaison Officer to provide Canberra with information on the European situation. His superior in Canberra, Colonel Hodgson, the permanent head of External Affairs, appears to have attracted little attention relative to his counterpart in New Zealand, but seems to have been just as important in the formulation of foreign policy, for instance delineating 'the permanent bases' of Australian policy for Lyons in a way roughly analogous to what Berendsen had done with New Zealand's 'Moral Foreign Policy' for the triumvirate's use in the 1938 election.⁸⁴

As in New Zealand, the government's flagship policy was social security, but their National Insurance Act had proved surprisingly unpopular with all sections of the public, and the government was now trying to find a way to walk away from it before it came into force on 1 January 1939.⁸⁵ The arguments over what should replace it, fed into the main question confronting the government, which was the issue of the leadership, as by now the U.A.P. was anything but united. Originally formed out of disparate groups opposed to the Scullin Labor Government, his long departure from the political scene, and Labor's subsequent lack of electoral success had increasingly removed the need for co-operation from the various U.A.P. factions. By October 1938, the latter were growing increasingly fractious, and the party's aging leader, Joe Lyons, was having increasing difficulty keeping them under control and the stress of this was only exacerbated by the international situation.⁸⁶ Lyons loathed war, calling his wife during the Sudeten Crisis begging her to drop everything and come to

⁸² Fry, 'Agents and Structures,' pp. 296 – 7.

⁸³ Sir Thomas Walter White as cited in John Rickard, 'White, Sir Thomas Walter (1888 - 1957)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography Online*, <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160636b.htm?hilite=White>.

⁸⁴ A. W. Martin, assisted by P. Hardy, *Robert Menzies: A Life*, Vol.1, 1894 – 1943, (Melbourne, 1993) (hereafter, *Menzies*), p. 225; NAA, CP103/17/Bundle 7NN/Undated Memo from Colonel Hodgson: 'Points on Foreign Policy'; NANZ, EA/1/58.8.1pt1a-ExtrnlRelGen/undated memo by Berendsen.

⁸⁵ K. White, *Joseph Lyons: Prime Minister of Australia, 1932 – 1939* (hereafter, *Lyons*), (Melbourne, 2000), pp.174-5 & 186; W. J. Hudson, *Casey*, (OUP, 1986), pp.104 – 5; & Sir Earle Page, *Truant Surgeon: The Inside Story of Forty Years of Australian Political Life* (hereafter, *Truant Surgeon*), Mozley, A. (Ed.), (Sydney, 1963), p. 268.

⁸⁶ TNA, DO/121/46/Sir Geoffrey Whiskard to Sir Thomas Inskip, 28 April 1939; see also Page, *Truant Surgeon*, p. 262; & W. J. Hudson, *Casey*, p. 104.

Canberra from Tasmania, 'as it's war in the morning, and I can't face it alone.'⁸⁷ The remark also indicated, however, that he would have brought Australia into the war at Britain's side in 1938, if events had turned out differently. Lyons's pacifist tendencies, however, made him an inveterate opponent of compulsory military training (hereafter C.M.T.) driving him into conflict with the cabinet hawks over the issue.⁸⁸ The resulting compromise led to a voluntary recruitment drive which Lyons had difficulty putting his heart into because of his innate pacifism.⁸⁹ His most recent biographer depicts him as undergoing a breakdown in consequence of the Sudeten Crisis, leading to a three week break from politics, which in turn gave rise to rumours that he was going to resign.⁹⁰ In his memoirs, Sir Earle Page, the leader of the Country Party, implied Bob Menzies, the Attorney-General, and one of the candidates for the succession, was particularly disappointed when these rumours proved to be unfounded and Lyons was flown in to lead the government delegation to the Premiers' Conference in October.⁹¹

When this meeting failed to deliver significant results, Menzies gave a speech on leadership which he argued was aimed at the squabbling State Premiers, but which was instead widely seen as critical of Lyons.⁹² In a little over a week, Curtin, the Labor leader, had seized on the issue, the Minister for Trade and Customs, T. W. White, had resigned from cabinet, Keith Murdoch's newspapers had begun to speculate on the leadership question, and Sir Henry Gullett, White's predecessor, had raised the matter at an internal party meeting.⁹³ An aura of crisis was beginning to develop.

Lyons's response was to turn to Bruce, who had formerly been Prime Minister, in an attempt to reunify the party.⁹⁴ The latter was increasingly seen as a potential successor to the Prime Minister and spent December 1938 to March 1939 in Australia in desultory discussions on the issue.⁹⁵ In the absence of concrete developments, the sense of crisis began to wane and Menzies toyed with the idea of leaving politics permanently, only to be dissuaded by Page.⁹⁶ Bruce also used the lull to attempt to persuade the Attorney-General

⁸⁷ J.A.L. Lyons, as cited in White, *Lyons*, p. 176.

⁸⁸ L. F. Fitzhardinge, *William Morris Hughes: A Political Biography*, Vol. III, 'The Little Digger' (Sydney, 1979) (hereafter, *Hughes*), p. 649.

⁸⁹ White, *Lyons*, p. 179.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁹¹ See Ch. 2, below and Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp. 262 – 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.264; White, *Lyons*, p. 178.

⁹³ White, *Lyons*, p. 179- 80.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁹⁵ White, *Lyons*, p. 183.

⁹⁶ Page, *Truant Surgeon*, p. 265

that Lyons remained an important electoral asset even if he had weaknesses.⁹⁷ In fact, Menzies did not resign until cabinet finally resolved to abandon the national insurance scheme on 14 March 1939, also citing disagreements over 'important aspects of defence expenditure' in support of his decision.⁹⁸ Bruce was still in the country and Lyons turned to him again, but they failed to agree on terms for a handover of power and the High Commissioner left to return to London via the United States.⁹⁹ Billy Hughes, the pugnacious Minister for External Affairs, took over Menzies's post of Attorney-General.¹⁰⁰

At odds with both Lyons and Menzies, Hughes was not a particular fan of appeasement; successfully opposing almost alone in cabinet the hard-line appeasers' desire to advocate an even stronger line against the Czechs.¹⁰¹ His views on External Affairs were somewhat at variance with the rest of his colleagues, which had already led to his being excluded from the government.¹⁰² His return and appointment to the portfolio of External Affairs in 1937 can only have been due to a combination of a desire to keep his friends close and his enemies closer on the part of Lyons, together with the unrealistic hope that the responsibilities of office would somehow tame 'the Little Digger' (a reference to his close bond with war veterans).¹⁰³ Lyons was to be sorely disappointed in this latter respect, as Hughes embarked on a series of vocal disputes with the Germans and Italians. Keeping him in government did have its advantages, however, as Lyons was able to exercise some degree of control, leading Hughes to complain off the record to the press that the Minister for External Affairs was not allowed to express his opinion on external affairs.¹⁰⁴ Another *faux pas*, about not trusting Hitler even if he was to swear on a stack of Bibles stretching from Canberra to Broken Hill, was likewise kept off the record.¹⁰⁵ At least while he was a minister these things could be suppressed, whereas on the back benches he would be free to speak his mind, with all its attendant consequences. Lyons in fact confided in Sir Geoffrey Whiskard, the British High Commissioner in Canberra, who duly relayed this information to London, that he was not sure whether Hughes was more trouble in or out of government.¹⁰⁶ Already in his seventies,

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 185 – 6.

⁹⁸ R. Menzies, as cited in White, *Lyons*, pp. 187 – 9.

⁹⁹ White, *Lyons*, p. 183.

¹⁰⁰ Fitzhardinge, *Hughes*, p. 650.

¹⁰¹ TNA, DO/35/554/82/101/Cable from British High Commissioner, Canberra to Dominions Office, 2 September 1938.

¹⁰² L. F. Fitzhardinge, 'Hughes, William Morris (Billy) (1862 - 1952)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography Online*, <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090395b.htm>.

¹⁰³ TNA, DO/121/46/Sir Geoffrey Whiskard to Sir Thomas Inskip, 28 April 1939.

¹⁰⁴ Fitzhardinge, *Hughes*, pp. 649 – 50.

¹⁰⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁰⁶ TNA, DO/121/46/Sir Geoffrey Whiskard to Sir Thomas Inskip, 28 April 1939

the latter never seemed to tire of finding someone to fall out with (Whiskard described Hughes as 'a bitter enemy' of Menzies after the latter had become Prime Minister, 'ready at any time to stab him in the back').¹⁰⁷ Passionate and belligerent, he injected much needed drive into the government's recruitment campaign for the militia during 1938-39 and he would eventually run Menzies a close second in the leadership race in April 1939.¹⁰⁸ His impressive showing resulted in the award of the post of Deputy Prime Minister, but, perhaps wisely, Menzies would choose to hand External Affairs (despite an attempt by Hughes to bully him into leaving things as they were) over to the more diplomatic Sir Henry Gullett, who, however, does not appear to have carried much weight ('nobody pays any attention to Gullett', as Whiskard put it).¹⁰⁹

Lyons's sudden death on the 7 April 1939 failed to resolve anything. Hughes appears to have tried to exploit his new position as Attorney-General to have himself appointed Prime Minister, but when that gambit failed, advised Page to form an interim government while the U.A.P. selected a new leader.¹¹⁰ The Country Party leader and the Treasurer, Richard Casey, then attempted one final time to persuade Bruce to return and lead the party now that Lyons was gone, but, this proved as unattractive as when the latter had been alive.¹¹¹ Casey had been, in many ways, the obvious successor to Lyons. Young, personable and well-connected, he seemed the ideal candidate. His mentor, Bruce, when Prime Minister, had sent Casey to London as the first Australian Liaison Officer in the 1920s, where he had come under the tutelage of Sir Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary and Secretary for the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID).¹¹² Casey therefore had experience of working at the heart of government and direct personal knowledge of the major players in Westminster and Whitehall. His return to Australia had seen him venture into the political arena, where he now held the vital role of Treasurer, which had left him responsible for steering the government's flagship national insurance legislation into practice. However, while success might have crowned Casey's candidature, the government's decision to abandon it reflected poorly on the Treasurer.¹¹³ He was in any case perhaps a little too personable; with the suggestion that he faithfully supported Lyons over national insurance, C.M.T. and maybe even appeasement out of personal loyalty, rather than conviction, raising questions over his

¹⁰⁷ TNA, DO/121/46/Sir Geoffrey Whiskard to Sir Thomas Inskip, 19 June 1939

¹⁰⁸ L. F. Fitzhardinge, *Hughes*, pp. 649 & 651.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, DO/121/46/Sir Geoffrey Whiskard to Sir Thomas Inskip, 28 April 1939 & 19 June 1939.

¹¹⁰ L. F. Fitzhardinge, *Hughes*, p.650; Page, *Truant Surgeon*, p.269.

¹¹¹ White, *Lyons*, p.190; L. F. Fitzhardinge, *Hughes*, p.651; Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp.270 – 8; & W. J. Hudson, *Casey*, p. 106.

¹¹² W. J. Hudson, *Casey*, p. 59.

¹¹³ T. White as cited in White, *Lyons*, p. 179.

leadership potential.¹¹⁴ His desperate attempts to persuade his mentor Bruce to return equally do not appear to have helped his candidacy.¹¹⁵ He lost out at the first ballot, but appears to have resented Menzies's success and to have tried to undermine the latter's leadership in cabinet, according to Whiskard.¹¹⁶

After the final abortive attempt to lure Bruce back into federal politics, Page, at Hughes's instigation, then warned his coalition partners the Country Party would not serve under Menzies, if the latter was elected leader on 18 April 1939. The sheer effrontery of the junior partner trying to dictate to the senior one, after the excessive benefits it was perceived to have derived from coalition, seems to have been sufficient to persuade the U.A.P. to narrowly opt for Menzies over Hughes on the second ballot in the contest; Casey and White having been eliminated in the first round.¹¹⁷ Page thereupon launched a bitter, public attack on Menzies, citing both the latter's resignation from Lyons's cabinet and his decision not to volunteer for front-line action during the First World War as proof of his unsuitability to lead the country at the present time.¹¹⁸ The Country Party leader and his followers then left the coalition, leaving the U.A.P. to continue alone.

If opposition to C.M.T. in the contemporary international climate had undermined Lyons's credibility as leader, in the way Keith Murdoch (proprietor of the *Herald* and *Age* newspapers in Melbourne) believed, clearly Menzies also had weaknesses.¹¹⁹ While considered pro-German by writers such as Lyons's biographer, Karen White, he actually appears to have been sceptical about the ultimately peaceful nature of Nazi intentions, and his advocacy of pressurising the Czechs therefore seems to be pragmatic rather than idealistic.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, his vigorous defence of appeasement in the aftermath of Munich was supplemented by his role in the *Dalfram* dispute, where, as Attorney-General, he took a hard-line stance with dockers who were refusing to load pig-iron on to the freighter *Dalfram* for export to Japan, for putative use in the latter's war effort against China.¹²¹ Menzies's part

¹¹⁴ W. J. Hudson, *Casey*, p. 104, White, *Lyons*, p. 179, and TNA, DO/35/554/82/101/Cable from British High Commissioner, Canberra to Dominions Office, 2 September 1938.

¹¹⁵ W. J. Hudson, *Casey*, p. 106

¹¹⁶ L. F. Fitzhardinge, *Hughes*, p. 651; TNA, DO/121/46/Sir Geoffrey Whiskard to Sir Thomas Inskip, 19 June 1939.

¹¹⁷ TNA, DO/121/46/Sir Geoffrey Whiskard to Sir Thomas Inskip, 28 April 1939; NLA, *Lyons Papers* (MS4851), 2/12/ S. Arnold, to Lyons, 4 January 1939, p. 3; L. F. Fitzhardinge, *Hughes*, p. 651.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 650; Page, *Truant Surgeon*, p. 269.

¹¹⁹ White, *Lyons*, pp. 185 – 6.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 172 & 175 – 6; TNA, DO/114/94/Note of Meeting at House of Lords; NLA, *Menzies Papers* (MS4936)/Box 579/Menzies to Halifax, 6 August 1938.

¹²¹ A. W. Martin, *Menzies*, pp. 251 – 6; see also chapter two, below.

in this earned him the persistent nickname 'Pig-Iron Bob' and made it hard to depict him as a heroic resister of aggression.¹²² While he had resigned over his differences with Lyons on defence (as well as national insurance, which was now put out for consultation, rather than reintroduced), he took no steps to implement C.M.T. prior to the outbreak of war, despite his previous support for the measure.¹²³ He was, however, in a difficult position on all matters military, due to his record in the previous war. Certainly, his then colleague, T. W. White, had considered Menzies attendance at the unveiling of the Australian War Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux inappropriate the previous summer.¹²⁴ Equally, his mother's explanation that his parents had forbidden him to go to war, as they had already given enough to the country by allowing his elder brothers to do so, scarcely added to his credibility as a potential war leader.¹²⁵ This weakness was exacerbated by his feud with Page, which now left him with a minority administration; not even the largest party in the House, and dependent on winning support for his measures on a case by case basis; unable to bring himself to agree terms to revive the coalition even after war had broken out, and Page had stepped down.¹²⁶ This naturally rendered the government's situation much more difficult in a time of international crisis, when decisive measures might be required. He was further hampered by having to retain both Casey and Hughes who each had grave difficulties reconciling themselves to the new leadership.¹²⁷ His government was therefore in a weak position generally, and particularly on matters pertaining to defence and the international situation.

The government in Australia therefore spent the period 1 October 1938 – 11 September 1939 divided against itself. While Lyons gave the impression of being worn out and out of tune with political realities, in many ways Menzies's predicament was worse. Lyons was at least able to elicit lip-service in support of his leadership from both the U.A.P. and the Country Party, whereas Menzies had to contend with the open hostility of Page. The resulting minority government's legitimacy was undermined by not even being the largest party in the House of Representatives. Lyons's pacifism might be a weakness in the circumstances of the period, but it was at least one borne of his convictions, whereas

¹²² White, *Lyons*, pp. 180 – 1.

¹²³ Fitzhardinge, *Hughes*, p. 649.

¹²⁴ White, T. W., *Diary*, 22 July 1938 as cited in A. W. Martin, *Menzies*, p. 232

¹²⁵ Menzies K., as cited in *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 4 May 1939 as cited in A. W. Martin, *Menzies*, p. 276.

¹²⁶ *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 19 April 1939, p. 1; Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp. 270 – 84.

¹²⁷ TNA, DO/121/46/Sir Geoffrey Whiskard to Sir Thomas Inskip, 19 June 1939.

Menzies's support for C.M.T. was undermined by his military record. Lyons's star might have been waning, but he was still the established leader, while Menzies was hindered in establishing himself after his election by both Casey and Hughes. Both Menzies and Lyons therefore faced significant limitations in their ability to formulate Australia's response to developments in Europe.

Unique Factors: South Africa

Race was the fundamental issue for the Union of South Africa. It was the only dominion in which those classed as being of European descent were in a minority, and this had created something of a siege mentality not present in Australia, Canada and New Zealand.¹²⁸ The situation was further complicated by tensions between the majority (c.60%) *Afrikaner* and minority (c.40%) English sections of this descent, which had produced political parties defined by their attitude to this divide.¹²⁹ Although generally referred to at the time as the race problem, identification with a section was primarily thought of in linguistic terms.¹³⁰ As in many countries, the Great Depression had brought about a realignment in domestic politics (the Fusion experiment): joining the overwhelming bulk of the *Afrikaner*-based National Party and the more pro-British South Africa Party in the new United National South Africa Party. In October 1938, the latter appeared to be master of all it surveyed. Led by General Hertzog, who had continuously been Prime Minister since 30 June, 1924, it had been returned in April 1938 with an only slightly less overpowering majority than it had previously held.¹³¹ His deputy, General Smuts, had been head of the South Africa Party, and was now recognised as the leader of the English tendency within the new Party, despite being himself an *Afrikaner*.

Hertzog was distinctly more sensitive to the concerns of *Afrikaners* than the English. He was always keen, for instance, to assert the status of *Die Stem van Suid-Afrika* as an alternate national anthem to *God save the King* for the Union, despite the anxieties on the issue

¹²⁸ University of Capetown (hereafter UCT), *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60/ Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark, Sir William, *Race Relations & Practical Trends in the Union of South Africa, 1935 – 1940*, (Internal Dominion Office Report, March 1940) (hereafter *Race Relations*), p. 15.

¹²⁹ *Idem*.

¹³⁰ See, for instance, National Archives of South Africa, hereafter NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.125/*Rand Daily Mail* 9 April 1938.

¹³¹ NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.151/*The Star*, 30 June 1939; UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60, *Race Relations*, p. 8.

expressed by Smuts.¹³² In February 1938, Hertzog had reacted to these complaints with the note:

Smuts has once again taken fright and now wants again – as usual – to pursue his dilatory political tactics, and therefore: legal issues should be left to the determination of the future, as if there were no *Afrikaans*-speaking followers whose rights and interests have to be defended; and as though there were no Malan opposition who would insist upon legal issues being determined now!¹³³

Ultimately, as this indicates, it was *Afrikaans*-speakers and the Malan opposition that held sway with the Prime Minister, not English-speakers and Colonel Stallard's Dominion Party. In a 1940 report on the racial situation for London, the British High Commissioner described how, at the time of Fusion in 1934, Dr. Malan had seceded from the General's National Party to form the 'purified' nationalists, mirroring Stallard's defection from the South Africa Party.¹³⁴ More of a leader who is followed than who leads, Hertzog had bitterly resented his former subordinate Malan's action as a personal betrayal, refusing to hold a civil conversation with him thereafter, as Clark explained. Hertzog had also spent his career promoting *Afrikanerdom*, therefore the insult implicit in Malan's appropriation of the term 'purified' to apply solely to the doctor's brand of nationalism, stung the Prime Minister deeply. Consequently, although Hertzog was occasionally capable of a grand gesture in the direction of the English, such as switching from republicanism to monarchism, his absorption with his lost supporters encouraged his nationalist tendencies at the expense of any sympathy he might have developed with Anglo-Saxon susceptibilities.¹³⁵ This fixation led him to attempt to promote the Union's sovereignty and independence at every available opportunity, as Clark had wearily reported to London in 1937.¹³⁶

He was therefore convinced South Africa must make its own decision as to involvement in any war, as his secretary informed a questioning party activist in 1939.¹³⁷ Not only that, but, in Clark's view, Hertzog believed the Union should only participate in those wars in which it had a direct interest, lest others continue to mistake it for a British dependency.¹³⁸ An attack

¹³² NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.34/File note by Hertzog on draft press release by General Smuts, 19 February 1938

¹³³ *Idem*.

¹³⁴ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60, *Race Relations*, p. 2

¹³⁵ See, for instance, NASA, *Smuts Papers* (A1), Vol.246/Correspondence/Smuts to M. Gillett, 30 November 1938

¹³⁶ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+, Clark to Harding, 8 March 1937, p.2

¹³⁷ NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.34/Jooste, N., (Private Secretary to the Prime Minister) to Flemmer, M. T. (United Party, East London), 9 February 1939

¹³⁸ J. B. M. Hertzog as cited in UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark to Eden, 15 September 1939, p. 14.

on another Commonwealth member, or even possibly on western Europe, would be justifiable grounds for war, as was noted by Charles Te Water, the South African High Commissioner in London, in a letter to his chief.¹³⁹ With regard to the Sudeten Crisis, the General could see no South African interest in preventing German expansion into eastern Europe and charged his representative with making sure that the British government understood this.¹⁴⁰ There was a contrary view. South Africa held expansionist ambitions: seeking greater involvement with Rhodesia; and the transfer of the protectorates of Basutoland (modern Lesotho), Bechuanaland (Botswana) and Swaziland from British to Union rule. According to this view, expressed by the former cabinet minister F. C. Sturrock to Clark, South African interests in fact demanded participation, as a British defeat would mean that the victor could treat South Africa as it wished regardless of whether it had been neutral or not, while a British victory would mean the Union could forget its ambitions, unless it had contributed to achieving that success.¹⁴¹ Hertzog, however, was too concerned about *Afrikaner* sensitivities to be swayed by such *Realpolitik*. His view, as he would indicate in a speech in September 1939, was that by entering such a war, his country would forever surrender its right to be considered a sovereign state.¹⁴² Participation was therefore not an option, as far as he was concerned, and he instructed the South African High Commissioner in London to advise the British government of his position.¹⁴³

This stance, however, left the General with the problem of the English supporters he had acquired with Fusion. They would tend to be as naturally alienated by neutrality as *Afrikaners* would tend to be by its opposite. Ideally, Britain would render this problem irrelevant by avoiding involvement in a war he felt unable to join in, and he consequently tried to steer London away from any acts that might draw them into conflict with Germany.¹⁴⁴ As tensions spiralled over the summer of 1938, however, Hertzog came to the conclusion he might have to confront the English section of his party with the unpalatable prospect of remaining neutral, while Britain went to war. Believing that supporters should and would follow their leader, however, the Prime Minister sought to resolve this difficulty

¹³⁹ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/ Te Water to Hertzog, 28 September 1938, p.3; NASA/*Te Water Papers*(A78)/Vol.13/Correspondence/Hertzog to Te Water, 15 June 1938

¹⁴⁰ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78) Vol.13/Correspondence/J. B. M. Hertzog to C. Te Water 22 March 1938.

¹⁴¹ F. C. Sturrock, as cited in TNA, DO/35/554/82/291/4/Sir William Clark to Dominions Office

¹⁴² J. B. M. Hertzog as cited in UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark to Eden, 15 September 1939, p. 14.

¹⁴³ NASA/*Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/Hertzog to Te Water, 15 June 1938

¹⁴⁴ See, for instance, NASA/*Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/Hertzog to Te Water, 10 March 1938, 22 March 1938, 24 March 1938, 9 May 1938, & Te Water to Stanley, 23 June 1938

by binding Smuts to the policy of neutrality, in the hope that his colleague would then ensure that his followers would remain loyal whatever happened. The device Hertzog sought to ensnare his deputy with was the Neutrality Pact.¹⁴⁵

This pact itself provided firstly that, if war broke out between Britain and Germany over Czechoslovakia, South Africa's relations with the belligerents would remain unchanged, which Britain appeared better placed to take advantage of than Germany through its command of the seas. Secondly, the Union's 'relations and obligations' would 'remain unimpaired' in regard to Simonstown Naval Base, and its memberships of the League of Nations and Commonwealth. The allusion to Simonstown related to South Africa's responsibility for landward security for the Royal Navy's base near Capetown, an obligation which was difficult to reconcile with the requirements of neutrality. The reference to the League of Nations appeared to have little practical applicability, as it is difficult to see what obligations could arise out of participation in that body that would conflict with those arising out of neutrality. It did, however, provide an opportunity for the Union to assert its sovereignty by juxtaposing its membership of that organisation with its role in the Commonwealth. It also took some of the sting out of the idea of South African obligations to the Commonwealth for *Afrikaners*, by providing a context in which responsibilities arising out of membership of international bodies were generally, rather than uniquely, acknowledged. What its Commonwealth obligations amounted to was another matter. As Smuts would point out the following year, Hertzog was entering uncharted legal territory, and the vague terms employed may have provided the government with considerable scope for interpreting matters as they saw fit, but also provided significant potential for considerable friction with the belligerents, when this interpretation did not accord with the latter's views.¹⁴⁶ Finally, no one would be permitted to use South African territory to impair such relations and obligations, which was likewise capable of a wide degree of interpretation, and unlikely to promote harmony with the warring parties.¹⁴⁷

The Neutrality Pact followed the course Oswald Pirow, the Minister of Defence and Transport, portrayed government decisions as taking.¹⁴⁸ In his biography of Hertzog, he went into considerable detail as to how the pact became government policy.¹⁴⁹ Firstly, it received

¹⁴⁵ NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.48/"B" Declaration of Policy, 28 September 1938, p.1

¹⁴⁶ J.C. Smuts, as cited in UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark to Eden, 15 September 1939, p. 10.

¹⁴⁷ NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.48/"B" Declaration of Policy, 28 September 1938, p. 2.

¹⁴⁸ Oswald Pirow, *James Barry Munnik Hertzog*, (London, 1958) (hereafter *Hertzog*), p. 192.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

the approval of the inner cabinet of himself, General Hertzog, General Smuts and N. C. Havenga, the Minister of Finance, on 1 September 1938. Of the four ministers mentioned, only Smuts had been in the South Africa Party, so that constituency was under-represented at the highest level. In this case, Hertzog had shown a draft of the pact to Pirow and possibly Havenga before showing it to Smuts. The Prime Minister confided in Pirow that he regarded it as a test of his partner's commitment to Fusion, and that he would end the experiment if it was rejected. According to Pirow, Smuts was rather taken aback when presented with it, and asked for time to think it over, which Hertzog readily agreed to, before conceding without being asked that the agreement would only apply to conflicts arising in eastern Europe. With this manoeuvre, Hertzog had effectively trapped Smuts: either the latter committed himself to neutrality on the Sudeten question in advance, or he broke the Fusion experiment over the issue; at a time when it was still by no means certain that war would break out, or that he would be able to persuade Parliament to follow him, rather than Hertzog, if it did. Having considered his options, Smuts agreed to the Pact the following day. Smuts was now effectively bound to the policy, and Hertzog shelved the agreement for the moment. However, on 28 September, as the crisis progressed towards its conclusion, he felt the time had come to present it to the full cabinet, and, in the absence of a contrary steer from Smuts, they dutifully acquiesced in its provisions.¹⁵⁰

Of the other members of the inner cabinet described above, Havenga seems to have had little direct involvement with external affairs, beyond accepting the Neutrality Pact and subsequently defending the policy to the British High Commissioner, Sir William Clark in the Spring of 1940.¹⁵¹ Pirow's relatively easy access to the Prime Minister, however, did give rise to rumours that the latter was in Pirow's pocket, suggesting decisions may have been reached even before consultation with the Inner Cabinet, but, both Malcolm MacDonald, the then Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, and Clark, identified Dr. Helgard D. J. Bodenstein, the Permanent Secretary at the Prime Minister's Department and the Department for External Affairs, rather than Pirow, as the person exercising undue influence over Hertzog, with MacDonald even going so far as to state Bodenstein's 'removal from his present post is one of the most important changes required in the British Commonwealth.'¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.48/"B" Declaration of Policy, 28 September 1938

¹⁵¹ Pirow, *Hertzog*, p. 226; UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60, *Race Relations*, p. 17

¹⁵² Van Den Heever, C. M., *General J.B.M. Hertzog*, (Johannesburg, 1946), p. 277, Pirow, *Hertzog*, p. 244; UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Personal Letters/Sir William Clark to Sir Harry Batterbee 13 October 1936 and Malcolm MacDonald to Sir William Clark 22 February 1937

There is certainly some indirect evidence that Bodenstein was more of a nationalist than his chief, and that his relationship with the opposition *Die Burger* newspaper verged on being 'improper,' which may suggest that he might have sought to push Hertzog beyond where the General would otherwise have gone.¹⁵³ Yet, Bodenstein was enough of a pragmatist to continue serving under the far less congenial regime of General Smuts.¹⁵⁴ Thus it is doubtful if he ever risked allowing his personal inclinations to impinge on his working relationship with Hertzog, particularly as the latter had a well earned reputation for being autocratic and aloof. Far from driving policy, 'Body's' role appears to have been to provide legalistic arguments for the positions the General wanted to advance, and to occasionally act as cat's paw in situations where it would have been impolitic for Hertzog to intervene himself, as Clark reported home in March 1937.¹⁵⁵ This can be seen in Bodenstein's various dealings with Clark, where only the latter's wishful thinking allowed him to believe the General's undoubted charm was evidence of discomfiture at his subordinate's activities, even when this supposed embarrassment led to no significant modification in the latter's future behaviour.¹⁵⁶ The General was in fact deeply intolerant of presumption in his subordinates; coldly declining to inform Dr. Stefanus Gie, the South African Minister in Berlin and Stockholm, of government policy, when the latter had been impertinent enough to indicate he needed to know the government's current official stance on the question of returning Germany's colonies.¹⁵⁷ The apparent absence of any form of rebuke for Bodenstein was therefore an indication that the latter's actions in fact met with the General's approval, not that Hertzog was in any sense an indulgent master, as Clark seems to have assumed.¹⁵⁸ Hertzog was every inch the autocrat, given to taking decisions in isolation, and then presenting both inner and outer cabinets with these as virtual ultimata, as with the Neutrality Pact, above.¹⁵⁹

Pirow, similarly, seems to have adopted a subordinate role in decision-making, at least with regard to external affairs. The son of a German missionary, who held the posts of Minister of Transport and Defence, he depicted himself as being entirely in accord with the General on

¹⁵³ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark to Harding, 10 March 1937, p. 2

¹⁵⁴ TNA, DO/35/540/C87/62A/Sir Edward Harding to Sir Cosmo Parkinson, 6 March 1940, p. 1

¹⁵⁵ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark to Harding, 8 March 1937, p. 2

¹⁵⁶ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark to Harding, 8 March 1937, 10 March 1937, and Clark to MacDonald, 10 March 1937

¹⁵⁷ NASA, SAB/BTS/1/4/4/German Colonial Policy/Dr. Gie to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 15/9/37, and Pretoria to Dr. Gie, 15/9/37

¹⁵⁸ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark to MacDonald, 10 March 1937, p. 2

¹⁵⁹ For other examples of autocratic behaviour see, for instance, UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark to Harding, 8 March 1937, p. 4, Clark to Machtig, 30 November 1939, p. 6

external affairs in his biography of Hertzog.¹⁶⁰ The European situation therefore seemed both to provide Pirow with an opportunity to use his German background to advantage, and Hertzog with an opening to engage a trusted confidante in European diplomacy, hence the former's proposed trip to London in November 1938 to discuss defence matters, which had been in mind since a January 1938 meeting between Pirow and Clark, expanded to include talks in Lisbon, Burgos, Berlin, Brussels and Rome.¹⁶¹ Yet it seems questionable whether Pirow was truly at one with Hertzog on external affairs, as he struggled to explain the latter's stance on neutrality, arguing first that the government had to adopt its secret Neutrality Pact because of *Afrikaner* public opinion, but then that the government had to maintain *Afrikaner* public opinion in order to preserve its secret neutrality policy, all of which appeared pointless if the policy itself was only to be of transitory applicability, as Pirow apparently let slip to both Goering and Malcolm MacDonald, the then British Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. According to his biography of Hertzog, Pirow told Goering in November 1938 that the Fusion government would have remained neutral if war had broken out over the Sudeten issue, but that pressure would have brought the cabinet down within six months, while according to a report from Stirling to Canberra, the South African had told MacDonald that South Africa would not have joined the war for six months, but that no South African government could remain neutral and in power beyond that.¹⁶² While clearly the implied difference as to whether the Fusion regime would continue or not was simply to make his message more palatable to his different hosts, Pirow was consistent that pressure would force South Africa to participate within a time frame of six months. This is entirely at odds with Havenga's version of the government's (and hence Hertzog's) position, as explained to Clark in front of the General in the spring of 1940, without any correction or qualification by the latter. In the latter account, Union participation was not certain, but conditional on German actions, and without any reference to a time frame or pressure.¹⁶³ Pirow's apparent confusion on these issues implies that neutrality was not his policy, contrary to what Clark thought, but that the minister simply went along with Hertzog's position out of loyalty or expediency, rather than understanding and agreement.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Pirow, *Hertzog*, p. 248

¹⁶¹ TNA, DO/119/5092/Union Co-operation with UK forces/Note of Meeting between Pirow and Clark, 10 January 1938, p. 5

¹⁶² Oswald Pirow, *Hertzog*, p. 235; NAA, A981/4/GER 41/Germany – Relations with SA/Pirow to MacDonald, as cited in Stirling to Hodgson, 21 December 1938, p. 2

¹⁶³ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Race Relations and Political Trends in the Union of South Africa, 1935 – 40, by Sir William Clark, p. 17

¹⁶⁴ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark to Eden, 15 September 1939, p. 14

It therefore seems unlikely that either Bodenstein or Pirow's influence ever extended beyond where Hertzog was already willing to go. Their roles were essentially subordinate, providing him with technical expertise, or acting as his mouthpiece. Smuts's role was different. As seen earlier, Hertzog appears to have been routinely dismissive of Smuts's concerns about the party's English support, but nonetheless, also seems to have expected his deputy would duly keep his followers in line. They were, however, as the British High Commissioner speculated, unlikely to meekly follow Smuts into neutrality in their entirety.¹⁶⁵ The historian Michael Fry, following Robert Citino, goes further, arguing that a majority in Parliament opposed neutrality.¹⁶⁶ Citino's account, however, is based on a report by the German minister, Leitner, which simply cites in support of this 'a recent survey' that was supposedly inclining Hertzog towards proroguing Parliament to overcome this obstacle to his plans.¹⁶⁷ It is doubtful Leitner's report is accurate. Hertzog appears, right up to the end, to have believed that he would achieve a majority in Parliament, confiding as much to the Governor-General on the eve of his eventual defeat.¹⁶⁸ Such confidence would seem inexplicable if he had truly been convinced by a survey suggesting otherwise in 1938, as indicated here, and Hertzog had no obvious motive for misleading the king's representative. In any case, *Afrikaners* were in the majority, tended to be more politically active than the English, and more concentrated in rural constituencies, which had smaller electorates than their urban counterparts, as Clark explained to London in 1940.¹⁶⁹ All this suggests an *Afrikaner*, and therefore inherently pro-neutral, majority in the House in 1938. This is implicitly supported by Clark, as he indicated Smuts needed *Afrikaner* support to attain his majority in September 1939.¹⁷⁰ It therefore seems unlikely that Parliament would have overturned neutrality in 1938 and it could also be expected that Smuts would have been able to hold on to some of his English supporters. Nonetheless, it does seem likely this would have been a step too far for many, triggering defections to the Dominion Party, and weakening Smuts's position in the United Party.

¹⁶⁵ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark to Eden, 15 September 1939, p. 14

¹⁶⁶ Fry M. G., 'Agents and Structures: The Dominions and the Czechoslovak Crisis, September 1938' in *Diplomacy and Statecraft* Vol. 10: 2&3 (1999) p. 328

¹⁶⁷ "Union von Sudafrika während der Krise über die Sudetenfrage, Leitner to German Foreign Office, Pretoria, 9 October 1938 as cited in Citino, R., *Germany and the Union of South Africa in the Nazi Period*, (New York, 1991), p. 180

¹⁶⁸ Hertzog, J. B. M., as cited in UCT, *Duncan Papers*/BC294/J2/Memorandum by Duncan, 4 September 1939

¹⁶⁹ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60, *Race Relations*, pp. 13 & 15.

¹⁷⁰ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers*/BC81/D60/Clark, Sir William, *Race Relations & Practical Trends in the Union of South Africa, 1935 – 1940*, (Internal Dominion Office Report, March 1940), p. 9

Smuts, however, seems to have been inclined towards neutrality in 1938, even before Hertzog presented him with the virtual ultimatum over the Neutrality Pact. The Deputy Prime Minister had written to Leo Amery, the former British Secretary of State for the Colonies, in the spring of 1938, casting doubt on whether any of the dominions would ever fight for 'France and Belgium' again, let alone 'in the Battles of Central and Eastern Europe.'¹⁷¹ Like Hertzog, Smuts was a long-term critic of Versailles, but, unlike the latter, had little sympathy for Germany's rulers, hoping as early as February 1938 in a letter to his friend Margaret Gillett, that 'the revolt of the Christian conscience in Germany will yet prove the turning of the tide.'¹⁷² He did not, however, regard the Sudeten issue as one which justified war, let alone South African participation in it, as Sir William Clark reported to Eden the following year.¹⁷³ Indeed, he confided to the Gilletts: 'it is difficult to see what great interest could justify another world war today.'¹⁷⁴ Smuts had invested at least as heavily in Fusion as Hertzog, putting up with the latter's autocratic ways, and giving way over contentious issues, so it was never likely that he would initiate a breach unless he was absolutely convinced there was no alternative. Given his views on the Sudetenland, there was therefore never any question that he would reject the proffered Neutrality Pact. Smuts also seems, however, to have persuaded himself that war could be avoided, writing to Sir John Power, the Westminster M.P. for Wimbledon, that he expected Chamberlain's face-to-face diplomacy to work 'as no great power today wishes to get involved in a general war,' and to his biographer, Sarah Millin, that 'it is almost inconceivable that the world would be launched once more into general war,' even if it was 'trembling in the balance.'¹⁷⁵ Should his views prove correct, he would never have to face the issue of convincing his supporters about the merits of neutrality or its consequences.

Broadly in agreement with Hertzog and Smuts, the South African Governor-General, Sir Patrick Duncan, felt the dominions would be 'hard put' to follow Britain into a war to maintain the existing situation over the Sudeten issue in a personal letter of 25 August 1938.¹⁷⁶ Sir Patrick's opinions mattered because it would be the responsibility of the Governor-General to determine any constitutional implications consequential on the demise of Fusion in the wake of an external crisis. Universally recognised as the first South African

¹⁷¹ NASA, *Smuts Papers*(A1)/Vol.243/Smuts to Amery, 28 March 1938, p. 2

¹⁷² NASA, *Smuts Papers* (A1)/Vol.243/J. C. Smuts to M. C. Gillett 10 February 1938, p. 3

¹⁷³ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Clark to Eden, 15 September 1939, p. 21

¹⁷⁴ NASA, A1/243/Smuts to M.C. Gillett 10 October 1938

¹⁷⁵ NASA, *Smuts Papers*(A1)/Vol.243/Smuts to Sir John Power, 15 September 1938; NASA, *Smuts Papers*(A1)/Vol.243/Smuts to S. G. Millin, 14 September 1938

¹⁷⁶ UCT, *Duncan Papers*/BC294/A163/Duncan to Brand, 25 August 1938

to hold that post, Sir Patrick's appointment appeared to be a great success for Hertzog in his continuing efforts to assert the Union's status as a sovereign, independent entity; indicating South Africa was no longer reliant on a 'Mother Country,' to which *Afrikaners* felt no emotional tie, to provide it graciously with its acting head of state.¹⁷⁷ By selecting Sir Patrick, a member of cabinet who had long represented the English South African community, Hertzog appeared to have been particularly shrewd, as Sir William Clark, the British High Commissioner in South Africa, reported to London, because a South African was calculated to win over wavering *Afrikaners* to that institution, while a member of the English community was likely to sweeten the pill of reduced British ties for that section of the population.¹⁷⁸ It therefore perfectly reflected Hertzog's concept of Fusion, by bringing both communities together into what the General had unilaterally concluded was an appropriate compromise for each. He was accordingly determined to have his way, meeting Palace objections to the candidacy of a politician unknown to the King, by having Duncan resign as an M.P. and present himself at Court.¹⁷⁹

According to Clark, however, the results were rather less than impressive from Hertzog's point of view; with *Afrikaners* remaining largely indifferent to the office and the English initially objecting that Duncan had 'sold the pass.'¹⁸⁰ Moreover, Sir Patrick was no South African. Born and educated in Britain, he had come out to South Africa at the age of thirty as part of Milner's kindergarten, been involved with the Unionist Party before joining Smuts in Cabinet in 1921, and then following him into Fusion.¹⁸¹ Rather than a Royal appointee, with the dominant imperative to keep the throne out of controversy at all costs, and only a transient connection to the English community in the Union, Hertzog had therefore placed the interpretation of the constitution in the hands of a politician from Britain, who, whatever doubts he may have held about preserving the Eastern European *status quo*, had spent his career promoting the British connection with South Africa, and who was under an obligation as far as English opinion there was concerned.¹⁸² Hertzog's crowning success therefore always held the potential to prove his undoing in a constitutional crisis.

¹⁷⁷ See, for instance, UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60/ "Political Notes II – The Governor-Generalship", p. 1, Fry M. G., 'Agents and Structures' p. 298, Pirow, *Hertzog*, p. 207

¹⁷⁸ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60/ "Political Notes II – The Governor-Generalship", p. 2

¹⁷⁹ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Misc. Letters 1936+/Batterbee to Clark, 11 November 1936

¹⁸⁰ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60/ "Political Notes II – The Governor-Generalship", pp. 1 - 2

¹⁸¹ UCT, *Duncan Papers* (BC294), Guide to the Duncan Papers/Introduction/Biographical Note, p. ii and D1/18/19/Unionist Party to Duncan, 23 June 1920

¹⁸² UCT, *Duncan Papers* (BC294), A163/Duncan to Brand, 25 August 1938

His appointment of Charles Te Water as Union High Commissioner in London was a less spectacular but more effective success. Like Duncan, Te Water had been a career politician, but from the *Afrikaner*, rather than English, side.¹⁸³ He displayed the unquestioning loyalty that Hertzog required and, in fair measure, seemed to inspire in his subordinates, going so far as to resign rather than continue to serve under Smuts after the Neutrality Crisis that would see the latter replace Hertzog as Prime Minister on 4 September 1939.¹⁸⁴ He was an enthusiastic proponent of Hertzog's position that Britain should not involve itself in European adventures, and that, if it did, it had no right to expect South Africa to imperil its domestic unity by providing support.¹⁸⁵ As early as 1936, his counterpart in Berlin (and Stockholm), Dr. Stefanus Gie, had expressed support for a policy of friendship with Germany in a private letter to Te Water, partly out of hostility to Italian actions in Africa, which amounted to allowing Hitler a free hand in Eastern Europe.¹⁸⁶ The opportunity for reversing Mussolini's behaviour, if it had ever truly existed, had surely passed by the summer of 1938, but Gie's largely uncritical acceptance of German pronouncements in respect of the Czechs, indicated pro-German views continued to colour his judgement.¹⁸⁷ In contrast, Te Water was more inclined to exhibit a detached scepticism towards London's policy in his correspondence with Pretoria, despite the goodwill he undoubtedly harboured for Britain.¹⁸⁸ In large part, however, this simply reflected the different standings of the two legations. The British (particularly the Dominions Office) were keen to always at least give the impression that dominion opinion counted, so Te Water does not appear to have encountered any difficulty having South Africa's voice heard and treated seriously at the highest level, as with Hertzog's concerns over the colonial question.¹⁸⁹ Conversely, South Africa could exercise little influence in Berlin, and, in a report home, Gie admitted the virtual impossibility of his obtaining appointments with Nazi leaders like Ribbentrop and

¹⁸³ See NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.41/Correspondence/Te Water to Stallard, 14 January 1930, p. 2

¹⁸⁴ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14/Correspondence/Te Water to Smuts, 11 September 1939

¹⁸⁵ See, for instance, NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/Te Water to Hertzog, 29 September 1938, p. 2

¹⁸⁶ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14/Correspondence/Gie to Te Water, 20/5/36; NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14/Correspondence/Gie to Te Water, 4/6/36

¹⁸⁷ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/Hertzog to Te Water, 2 February 1938; See, for instance, Gie, Dr. F. S. N., as cited in NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/Hertzog to Te Water, 25 March 1938, and NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14/Correspondence/Gie to Te Water, 13 September 1938 Part II

¹⁸⁸ See, for instance, NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/Te Water to Hertzog, 23 September 1938, p. 3; NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/Te Water to Hertzog, 22 November 1938, p. 4

¹⁸⁹ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/Hertzog to Te Water, 18 February 1938

Goering.¹⁹⁰ Effectively this disparity drove South African strategy; Gie (and indeed the other Union representatives such as Waterson in Paris and Van Broekhuizen in the Hague) being used to collect information (of whatever quality) to furnish Hertzog with arguments for use in London, as in March 1938, when he used Gie's report that the Germans would drop their complaints about the treatment of the Sudeten Germans, if the Czechs would only abandon their Franco-Russian alliance, to try to persuade Britain into pressurising Prague to realign itself.¹⁹¹ Given the absolute imperative of averting war so that domestic harmony could be preserved, this provided an additional reason for vigorously supporting appeasement; Berlin's demands, regardless of their merits, or lack thereof, were beyond South Africa's influence, but Britain might just be open to Union pressure to satisfy German claims, and hence the Union's need for peace.

Given this overriding imperative, South Africa's diplomatic situation therefore simply reinforced the already overwhelming attractions of appeasement. Currents in favour of automatic participation and neutrality ran through the English and *Afrikaner* communities respectively, but Hertzog subscribed to neither of these polar positions. His neutral inclinations sprang from a romantic nationalism, but these were qualified by a desire to simultaneously maintain the imperial connection, which may have had a more than pragmatic foundation. Romantic nationalism defined his vision of South Africa as an independent entity which acted in accordance with its own interests and not at another's behest. Pragmatism and, quite possibly, solidarity drove him to accept the obligation to defend other Commonwealth countries if attacked, but, he would not move beyond benevolent neutrality otherwise. As far as he was concerned, unless South African interests were directly involved, any further step would effectively tie his country to another's policy and undermine its status as a sovereign, independent nation, which was unacceptable. In practice, due to his idiosyncratic governing style, he alone would be the arbiter of what those interests were. Bodenstein may have been unlikely to be content with Hertzog's stance on mutual defence, but could console himself that Hertzog was at least determined to assert the independence of South African policy from those of its Commonwealth partners. In any case, the doctor managed to reconcile himself to working for Smuts in the wake of the Neutrality Crisis, so he is unlikely to have encountered any insurmountable obstacles in

¹⁹⁰ NASA, SAB/BLO/117/PS/5/High Commission London/Vol.2/Extract Report by Gie forwarded to Inskip, pp. 1 -2

¹⁹¹ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14/Correspondence/Smuts to Te Water, 11 September 1939; NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14/Correspondence/Te Water to Van Broekhuizen, 12 January 1935; NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/Hertzog to Te Water, 25 March 1938.

working for Hertzog. Havenga seems to have accepted and supported Hertzog's position throughout. Pirow does not appear to have understood the finer nuances of this policy, but unsurprisingly, given his ambitions and wing of the party, gave every indication of being prepared to go along with it. Smuts, having convinced himself war was unjustified and unlikely, likewise appears to have had little difficulty in accepting the Neutrality Pact. Presented with this united front the full Cabinet was never likely to consider resistance. Not required to intervene on this occasion, the Governor-General's views nonetheless appeared in accord with his government's, and the implications of his British sympathies remained untested. Despite this unanimity at the heart of government, Hertzog appeared uncertain of his ability to persuade the English community in this direction, and hid behind the prescription that parliament would decide on participation should the occasion ever arise. This obfuscation could only persist as long as Britain remained free of European entanglements, and hence drove Hertzog into urging appeasement on the acquiescent British government for his own domestic interests.

Unique Factors: Canada

Like South Africa, Canada was a racially divided society, but along rather different lines. The indigenous peoples were vastly out-numbered by those of European descent and therefore did not assume the off-stage presence they held in the former country. Anglophones made up the majority of those of European descent and dominated the government, finance and industry. The Francophone *Quebecois* were the largest minority group, and in many ways (apart from constituting a majority) their position resembled that of the *Afrikaners*.¹⁹² Brought into the empire against their will, they saw no reason to identify with its unifying symbols, and did not share their Anglophone compatriots' emotional ties to the Mother Country. Catholic and conservative, only their exclusion from the centres of power had driven them into a support of the governing Liberals which was sometimes uncomfortable for both parties. Other significant groups included the Germans who had largely settled in the Mid-West and contributed to that region's perceived disinterest in the imperial connection.

¹⁹² This term is used here to describe Francophone inhabitants of Quebec, because the contemporary epithet French Canadian is somewhat imprecise. For instance, it would also cover the Francophone inhabitants of Prince Edward Island, who lacked the cohesion and influence of those within the larger province. *Quebecois*, while anachronistic, conveys a precision the other cannot. Similarly, *Quebecker* is used to describe an Anglophone inhabitant of the largely Francophone province.

It was the *Quebecois*, however, who were of greatest interest to the government. The watchword for Mackenzie King's government was unity, as he noted in his diary; 'I took the view that in the last resort, the unity of Canada was the test by which we should meet all these things.'¹⁹³ The unity he was concerned with was the unity of the English and *Quebecois* sections of society. Mackenzie King considered he had a good feel for the Anglophones and what they would, and would not, wear.¹⁹⁴ He was much less sure of the *Quebecois* and what he did not understand he feared, and what he feared, true to the spirit of the times, he wished to appease, even though he was not actually dependent on Quebec for his majority (the Conservatives had 39 seats in Parliament as against the Liberals' 171 of which only 55 came from Quebec).¹⁹⁵ The *Quebecois* members of his party had, however, been instrumental in raising him to the leadership of the Liberal Party and in keeping him there.¹⁹⁶ Yet Mackenzie King's inability to speak French and his instinctive liberalism prevented him from relating to their concerns, and he therefore needed an intermediary to communicate these to him. This role was occupied by Ernest Lapointe, the Minister for Justice and Deputy Prime Minister, of whom Mackenzie King noted: 'but for him I would never have been Prime Minister, nor would I have been able to hold office, as I had held it through the years.'¹⁹⁷ Yet, despite their long and successful political partnership, the two men do not appear to have been friends,¹⁹⁸ or even to have mixed socially (Mackenzie King's diary only notes them dining once together apart from formal state occasions in autumn 1938, for instance¹⁹⁹). The Prime Minister seems to have developed a need for Lapointe's counsel on Quebec, even when this was of questionable relevance. For instance, on 23 September 1938, it was falsely reported that fighting had broken out between the Czechs and Germans. Mackenzie King recorded his subsequent reaction in his diary. He felt that, if this news was confirmed, the government should issue a statement, 'at once, or today' to the effect that 'Canada will not sit idly by and see modern civilization destroyed.'²⁰⁰ He confirmed to a 'greatly shocked' Dr. Oliver Skelton, the permanent head of the Department of External Affairs, that this would be before Parliament had had the opportunity to debate the issue, as 'we would have to indicate long before Parliament met what our policy would

¹⁹³ Library and Archives Canada, hereafter LAC Online: www.collectionscanada.gc.ca, Biography/People, The Diaries of King, 6 July 1938

¹⁹⁴ See, for instance, *Ibid.*, 31 August 1938

¹⁹⁵ Election Results 14/10/35 as cited in Stacey, C. P., *Canada and the Age of Conflict: A History of Canadian External Policies*, Volume II, 1921 – 48: *The Mackenzie King Era* (Toronto, 1981), p. 167

¹⁹⁶ See Lita-Rose Betcherman, *Lapointe*, pp. 27-30 & 91-97.

¹⁹⁷ King, *Diary*, 19 July 1941, as cited in MacFarlane, J., *Ernest Lapointe and Quebec's influence on Canadian Foreign Policy*, (Toronto, 1999), p. 12

¹⁹⁸ *Idem.*

¹⁹⁹ King, *Diary*, 29 November 1938

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 23 September 1938.

be.’ The original report was, in fact, quickly disavowed, but the Canadian leader nevertheless decided that he should obtain the views of his colleagues on the question of issuing such a declaration, in case the circumstances envisaged subsequently arose, and so arranged to meet them that afternoon to discuss the matter, recording what transpired in his journal.²⁰¹ At the meeting, Charles Power, the Quebecker Minister for Pensions and Health, informed him that *Quebecois* opinion was not as vehemently anti-war as had been feared. Despite this reassuring news, Mackenzie King still felt the need to despatch a cable to Lapointe in Geneva, where he was on League of Nations’ business, even though Power had just been in Quebec and therefore the more likely of the two to be in touch with the rapidly changing tempo of events. The following day, however, the Prime Minister continued, the Minister of Justice responded urging nothing should be done prior to Parliament meeting.²⁰² As war did not break out at this point, it is not clear what impact this stance would have had on Canadian policy, but the Prime Minister clearly now felt the need to have his *Quebecois* lieutenant at hand, recalling him on and recording in his diary that Lapointe should never have gone abroad that summer.

In his article on the dominions and the Sudeten Crisis, Michael Fry also considered Charles Dunning, the Minister of Finance, and Ian Mackenzie, the Minister of Defence, should be included in the elite which ran Canada, however, it is apparent they lacked the influence of Lapointe and do not seem to have been kept particularly well informed.²⁰³ In fact, Mackenzie King does not seem to have valued Mackenzie’s abilities, but this assessment never seems to have translated itself into a perception that he had a responsibility, as Prime Minister, to transfer Defence to a more capable pair of hands.²⁰⁴ Dunning does not appear to have been particularly influential either, unlike his counterparts in the other dominions, Nash, Casey and even, to some extent, Havenga. He was now sickly and would resign from cabinet on 5 September 1939 on the grounds of ill-health, just under a week prior to the Canadian declaration of war.²⁰⁵ Having collapsed in the House in June 1938, he had yet to return to his post that October, amid considerable doubts about what workload he could sustain.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 23 September 1938.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 24 September 1938.

²⁰³ Fry, ‘Agents and Structures,’ p. 297

²⁰⁴ See, for instance, King, *Diary*, 128/946, Entry 2 December 1938

²⁰⁵ Parliament of Canada Biography Online, <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/parlinfo/Files/Parliamentarian.aspx?Item=b7bab241-2a80-47dc-b8e0-c1334a0b5abb&Language=E&Section=FederalExperience>

²⁰⁶ LAC, MG30/D33/Vol.13/Skelton, Dr. O. D., *Diary*, Entry 23 June 1938; TNA, DO/121/64/Sir Gerald Campbell, British High Commissioner in Ottawa, to Sir Edward Harding, Permanent Undersecretary of State for Dominion Affairs in the U.K., 13 October 1938, p. 3

Mackenzie King's detachment from all but Lapointe is supported by his future cabinet secretary Arnold Heeney's testimony that, in the wake of Munich, apart from Lapointe, 'there was no sign of ministers and officials being marshalled for the systematic consideration and disposition of external issues.'²⁰⁷ Collectively, however, as will be seen over the Jewish question, cabinet was capable of facing down Mackenzie King, or at least encouraging his natural instincts 'to never do by halves what he could do by quarters' and pull back from anything that smacked of decisiveness.²⁰⁸ Crerar, the minister responsible for immigration, and behind him his Director of Immigration, Blair, were important negative influences in this regard. Julian Doherty, in his 1970 article, '*Die Dominions und die britische Aussenpolitik von München bis Kriegsausbruch*' also emphasised the role of Skelton, the head of the Department of External Affairs. Heeney concurred, noting that 'it seemed to me that he [Mackenzie King] consulted almost exclusively with Skelton.'²⁰⁹ Given the plethora of minutes, memoranda and policy documents produced in support of Canadian neutrality by not just Skelton, but his subordinates, Loring Christie and Hume Wrong of the Department of External Affairs, particularly in comparison to their counterparts in the other dominions, it seems churlish to overlook them. Nonetheless Mackenzie King dismissed their stance as appealing only to a narrow group of intellectuals, writing in his diary in January 1939: 'I knew what a handful they were compared to the country as a whole and that my business was to tell Canada of her dangers.'²¹⁰ They did not speak for Canada and nor did Vincent Massey, the High Commissioner in London, who, much to his annoyance, was only allowed to attend meeting with the other High Commissioners at the Dominions Office in a personal capacity.²¹¹

Mackenzie King was perhaps the least likely member of the Dominion elites to lead a country. He seems to have lived in a fantasy world where supernatural elements had selected him to play a central role in the unfolding drama, noting in his journal that 'the unseen forces have unquestionably been working together in using me in this way toward helping in the

²⁰⁷ Heeney, A.D.P., *The Things that are Caesar's: The Memoirs of a Canadian Public Servant*, Heeney, B., (Ed.) (Toronto, 1972), p. 50; Heeney had been personally recruited by Mackenzie King to introduce private sector management techniques to the civil service.

²⁰⁸ Scott, F. R., 'William Lyon Mackenzie King' http://www.library.utoronto.ca/canpoetry/scott_fr/poem5.htm; See chapter three, below.

²⁰⁹ Heeney, *Memoirs*, p. 50

²¹⁰ King, *Diary*, 130/124, Entry 27 January 1939

²¹¹ Massey, V., *What's Past is Prologue: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, C. H.*, (Toronto, 1963), 19 & 24 September 1938, pp. 258 - 9

great purpose of the preservation of peace.²¹² This was through what he went on to describe as his 'close' personal connections with Hitler and Chamberlain, having met them both in 1937.²¹³ This was a remarkably persistent strand of his thought, and yet one which he seems to have managed to keep separate from practical politics, so that he was able to contemplate practical steps for preparing Canada for war with the 'gangster nations' while continuing to fantasise about bringing Hitler in from the cold.²¹⁴ His personal staff were certainly subjected to his unusual personal beliefs, but it is difficult to see how he could have preserved his political credibility if he had shared these with his professional colleagues.

Mackenzie King often complained that Canada was a difficult country to govern and that outsiders did not appreciate his position, but this merely reflected his own inability to relate to others' situations.²¹⁵ Financial woes in New Zealand, together with political disunity there, in Australia and South Africa made governing Canada seem child's play by comparison. The *Quebecois* might seem intransigent and incomprehensible to Mackenzie King, but he had Lapointe to mediate their concerns. Nonetheless, he was throughout this period extremely sensitive to anything which might play badly in Quebec, and this was the first hurdle any new proposal had to cross en route to acceptance. In particular, given their unhappiness with involvement in the previous war, he worried about how they would react if faced with another one. This had led him to adopt the stance at Geneva in 1936 that 'the Canadian Parliament reserves to itself the right to declare, in the light of the circumstances existing at the time, to what extent, if at all, Canada will participate in conflicts in which other members of the Commonwealth may be engaged.'²¹⁶ He would maintain this position down to the Canadian entry into the war on 10 September 1939. It did not, however, amount to a policy, as his then subordinate James Gibson (at the time an External Affairs Officer, but who would go on to have a distinguished career in academia, at Carleton and Brock universities in Canada) went on to explain, because it was not intended to 'arouse and mobilise public opinion in Canada behind any constructive approach to problems of increasing complexity and anxiety.'²¹⁷ In fact, it was an avoidance of policy as Mackenzie King was terrified that any such stance could only sow discord between the Anglophones and the *Quebecois*, which

²¹² King, *Diary*, 14 September 1938

²¹³ *Idem.*; Stacey, C. P., *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, pp. 210 - 12

²¹⁴ See, for instance, King, *Diary*, 31 January 1939

²¹⁵ Eays, J., "A Low Dishonest Decade": Aspects of Canadian External Policy, 1931 -1939' in Keenleyside, H. (Ed.), *The Growth of Canadian Policies in External Affairs*, (Durham, 1960), pp. 76 - 7

²¹⁶ King, 29 September 1936 at Geneva as cited in LAC, MG27/III/B10/Vol.50/38, p. 3

²¹⁷ King, as characterised in Gibson, J., 'Root and Branch in Canadian Foreign Policy', *Bulletin of Canadian Studies*, Vol. V(2) October 1981, p. 56

was precisely what he wished to avoid, and, as will be seen, this formula was instead actually used as a smokescreen to conceal a succession of different foreign policies, which Mackenzie King was anxious not to share with the electorate. Gibson was also sceptical about Parliament's ability to make an informed decision on external affairs given that 'the Standing Committee on Industry and International Affairs had not met in many years.'²¹⁸ Of course, given Mackenzie King's determination to avoid letting the public in on the circumstances under which their government would recommend war to parliament (a commendation which, given the size of the government's majority and Parliament's own lack of expertise, Parliament was almost certain to accept, unless the government was determined on a policy which would amount to electoral suicide), it was scarcely in his interests to bring his stance under Parliamentary scrutiny.

Despite these efforts to avoid consideration of her interests in connection with the question of war, Canada, had a direct, practical interest in entering a war involving Britain and any first-class power (excepting the United States, war against which was unwinnable).²¹⁹ In 1938, Newfoundland had been a dominion (1907-1933), but was not yet part of Canada, being then under direct British rule, and hence a legitimate target for any power at war with Britain. Given its remote location, low population and lack of strategic interest to Britain, it was naturally a low priority for defence spending in an era when there were so many more pressing concerns, so much closer to home. Newfoundland was, however, of vital concern to Canada. Not only did it sit astride the Gulf of St. Lawrence, it included Bell Island, whose undersea mines were, in the opinion of the Canadian Chiefs of Staff, as expressed in a 1938 report for the government, 'essential to the continued operation of the steel industry in Eastern Canada.'²²⁰ This report went on to dismiss British proposals for the defence of Newfoundland as 'superficial.' Under the circumstances, it was unlikely the British would contemplate modifying their position, which would in any case have involved 'consultation' and that was anathema to Mackenzie King.²²¹

The reason for this was his reliance on the prescription that it would be for Parliament to decide on war and peace. Consultation between parties implies a shared responsibility for the

²¹⁸ *Idem.*

²¹⁹ Neatby, H. Blair, King: *A Political Biography* Volume III *The Prism of Unity: 1932 -39*, (Toronto, 1972), p. 180

²²⁰ LAC/RG25/Vol.2448/Defence of Newfoundland/Vol.1/Jo int Staff Committee/Defence of Canada – Atlantic Coast, 5/4/38, p. 1

²²¹ TNA, DO/35/576/F706/48/Memo by MacDonald for Chamberlain, 23 March 1938, p. 1; see also King, *Diary*, 125/685, Entry 14 September 1938

decisions emerging from that process. Such a responsibility might even be considered to at least morally commit the participants in advance to partaking in courses of action consequent on that outcome. A government commitment, however, would restrict the options available to Parliament to choose from, despite the Prime Minister having repeatedly pledged that it would be for the latter body to make the decision, 'in light of all the circumstances.'²²² In this way the government could be seen to have pre-empted Parliament's decision. Mackenzie King was unalterably opposed to this, as Malcolm MacDonald, then Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs had advised Chamberlain in March 1938.²²³ This would not only leave the government open to accusations of misleading Parliament and the public, but also involve it in taking a public stance on the issue, which was precisely what the formula had been intended to avoid in the first place.²²⁴ Up to March 1938, MacDonald was able to comment that it was 'a rare event' to receive an opinion on external affairs from Canada, but the historians James Eayrs and Charles Stacey point out that thereafter Mackenzie King was unequivocal in voicing his support for appeasement to London.²²⁵ No doubt this was in part due to the confidential nature of much inter-governmental communication, but the implied double standard is perhaps unfair: support for appeasement, unlike, say, an offer to supplement the defences of Newfoundland, would not seem to commit Canada on the issue of war and peace in advance of Parliament's decision. Mackenzie King's underlying position therefore remained consistent: he would do nothing which would prejudice the issue.

This was not out of any sense of starry-eyed idealism, however. It was of course clear that the government would decide on involvement in any war, and Parliament would merely rubber-stamp the decision, given its composition and lack of experience in external affairs. Had the government wished Parliament to take a reasoned and responsible decision based on its own views, it would have provided the House with opportunities to develop expertise in this area, as Gibson points out.²²⁶ Mackenzie King's position was based on his insistence on unity. He was not prepared to take any step which might antagonise the *Quebecois*, and because of his lack of connection with them always aimed to err on the side of caution. He believed the majority would demand participation if war came, but feared the minority's reaction. Lapointe therefore had considerable influence and his apparent acceptance of the

²²² Mackenzie King, William Lyon 29 September 1936 at Geneva as cited in LAC, MG27/III/B10/Vol.50/38, p. 3

²²³ TNA, DO/35/576/F706/48/Memo by MacDonald for Chamberlain, 23 March 1938, p. 1.

²²⁴ See, for instance, King, *Diary*, 126/764, Entry 4 October 1938

²²⁵ TNA, DO/35/576/F706/48/Memo by MacDonald for Chamberlain, 23 March 1938, p. 1; Eayrs, J., *In Defence of Canada: Appeasement and Rearmament*, Vol. 2, Ch. 3 as cited in Stacey, C. P., *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, p. 215

²²⁶ Gibson, 'Root and Branch', p. 56

inevitability of participation if war came simplified matters considerably. The rest of the Cabinet was of less significance, although if united they remained capable of facing Mackenzie King down, particularly if they could work on his excessive sense of prudence. External Affairs officials presented a remarkably cohesive perspective in favour of neutrality, but as this was neither shared by the cabinet nor the country at large, its impact on Mackenzie King was negligible. The latter's belief in the imperatives of participation in war, and satisfying the *Quebecois* drove him in different directions, creating an impression of irresolution. In fact, the Prime Minister was personally and politically committed to participation, if war broke out over the use of force, as appeared likely over the Sudetenland. The situation was further complicated, however, by Mackenzie King's rather unusual personal beliefs, which cast him in the role of heroic conciliator, using his connections with Hitler and Chamberlain to attain a lasting peace, under the spiritual guidance of 'the unseen forces.'

Common Factors

Access to British markets was vital for the Dominions. Australia and New Zealand were permeated by a 'sense of utter dependence on the British market.'²²⁷ Professor John Roberts noted that after the war, Britain still took ninety per cent of New Zealand's exports.²²⁸ The country's standard of living was therefore heavily reliant on trade with the Mother Country, and any sudden interruption would have catastrophic effects, as the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff recognised in a December 1938 report for their government.²²⁹ McIntosh went further than this, pointing out that the economic situation was 'of paramount importance, Britain was our principal market, and she was too lightly dependent on us for foodstuffs and things like wool.'²³⁰ Australia exported a variety of items to the United Kingdom, including minerals and fruit, but mainly wheat and wool.²³¹ The Australian nationalist economic historian, Brian Fitzpatrick reported that in 1937 - 38, a total of 51.7% of Australian exports went to Britain and a further 13.18% went to British possessions, and that likewise, 40.9%

²²⁷ Miller, J.D.B., 'Introduction' in Livingston, W. S., & Louis, W. R., (Eds.) *Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands since the First World War* (Canberra, 1979), p. 2.

²²⁸ NLNZ, *Bassett Papers* (2000-094-02), interview of Sir Alister McIntosh by Professor John Roberts, 20 March 1978 (subsequently edited by McIntosh), p. 2.

²²⁹ NANZ, Nash/1262 WarPrep/Report of New Zealand Chiefs of Staff, December 1938, p. 2.

²³⁰ NLNZ, *Bassett Papers* (2000-094-02), interview of Sir Alister McIntosh by Mark King 27 November 1978.

²³¹ MacIntyre, S., *The Oxford History of Australia, Vol IV: 1901 -42*, Bolton, G., (Ed.), (Melbourne, 1986), p. 253.

and 15.66% of imports derived from Britain and its overseas possessions respectively.²³²

Given his views, Fitzpatrick was naturally keen to point out that these figures represented a decline from the imperial highpoint of the late nineteenth century, but nonetheless the figures remained high in absolute terms, and it would have been a courageous government which chose to ignore these salient facts. The interdiction or even disruption of trade flows with Britain would have a commensurate impact on the Australian standard of living, and a suddenly impoverished electorate might well prove a vengeful one.

South Africa, with its dominant gold-mining industry, might have been expected to have achieved a greater independence, but exports to London were crucial to the electorally important agricultural sector.²³³ This gave access to the British market a political significance out of all proportion to its actual financial value for the economy as a whole, and the mining industry itself was also dependent on the City of London to fund its expansion.²³⁴ Likewise Canada, with the economic powerhouse of the United States beside it, might have been considered able to dispense with the British market, but the impact of the Great Depression on its southern neighbour reinforced the economic significance of metropolitan Britain as protectionist measures in the United States reduced the value of Canadian exports there from \$150 million to just \$17 million at the start of the 1930s.²³⁵ In these circumstances, Canada needed every market it could get and, by 1938, Canadian exports to Britain matched those to the United States.²³⁶

Theoretically, the dominions provided Britain with primary products in return for finished goods under the Imperial Preference Scheme thrashed out at Ottawa.²³⁷ This was not an entirely satisfactory arrangement from the dominions' perspective, however, as it left them unduly exposed to fluctuations in the British economy, and in practice the picture was more complex than this. All the dominions, for instance, had trading arrangements with Germany, and other trading relationships were also of importance: in 1938, Canada was party to a three way deal between itself, Britain and the United States, while Australia supplied Japan with

²³² Fitzpatrick, B., *The British Empire in Australia: An Economic History 1834 -1939* (Melbourne, 1949), p. 312.

²³³ See Henshaw, P. J., 'Britain, South Africa and the Sterling Area: Gold Production, Capital Investment & Agricultural Markets, 1931' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol.39, 1, pp. 201 - 2 & 205 - 6.

²³⁴ *Idem*.

²³⁵ J. D. B. Miller, *The Commonwealth in the World*, (Aylesbury, 1958), p. 41; P. Knaplund, *Britain, Commonwealth and Empire, 1901 -1955*, (London, 1956), p. 321.

²³⁶ J. Darwin, 'A Third British Empire?' p. 71

²³⁷ See, for instance, B. R. Tomlinson, 'Imperialism and After: The Economy of the Empire on the Periphery' in J. M. Brown, & R. Louis, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol. IV 'The Twentieth Century' (Oxford, 1999), p. 363.

pig-iron and wool.²³⁸ While these external relationships complicated the developing pattern of trade, none actually served to eliminate the significance of the British market. Britain therefore remained of continuing economic importance to the dominions and access to this vital market would be jeopardised if the metropolitan country was occupied by a hostile power.

Ties of sentiment also bound the dominions to Britain. While there was considerable anti-British sentiment among *Afrikaners*, *Quebecois*, and Australians of Irish descent and dominion nationalists often favoured a stance that was more neutral than pro-British, significant portions of their populations also remained deeply attached to the Mother Country.²³⁹ This attachment was often most strident in those countries where anti-British sentiment was strongest, as pro-British elements sought to assert their identity in the face of those they perceived to be threatening it. In Canada, the cry of 'ready, aye, ready' was particularly associated with the opposition Conservative party, but it also found some support among Liberal ranks, as Mackenzie King recognised (for 'the Government could not, without suffering immediate defeat, adopt any such policy [of neutrality]'), and even, to a certain extent, shared it himself (as his biographer, H. Blair Neatby, points out), for instance, writing in his diary of 'the richer inheritance' of the British Commonwealth where Canada was 'part of a great whole, with kindred aims, ideals and institutions' (although he would probably never have recognised himself as having anything in common with what he liked to call 'jingoism and Tories').²⁴⁰ The Canadian leader was aware he could count on this constituency for support if the *Quebecois* proved intransigent, and his diary indicates how he used this to pressure the latter's representatives in Cabinet to go along with his policy: 'I told him [Power, one of the Quebec Ministers] that the Cabinet Ministers should realise it would be the end of Quebec, if any attitude of that kind [some of the Quebec ministers leaving the government in the event of war] were adopted.'²⁴¹

In South Africa, pro-British sentiment was divided between the extreme (in terms of the South African political landscape), if miniscule, opposition Dominion party, and one wing of the governing United Party. As it sought to preserve and promote the link with Britain, this sentiment ran counter to the ambitions of the prime minister, General Hertzog (who came

²³⁸ Mansergh P. N. S., *Commonwealth Experience*, p. 244.

²³⁹ See, for instance, NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.48/Deacon, W. A., 'Why Canada Won't Fight'

²⁴⁰ King, *Diary*, 17 September 1938; *Ibid.*, 31 August 1938; Neatby, *Prism of Unity*, p. 295; King, *Diary*, 24 October 1938; *ibid.*, 27 January 1939.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 31 August 1938

from the other wing of the party), to create a united, independent nation out of South Africa's *Afrikaner* and British tribes, as well as the lingering anti-British resentment he continued to harbour from the loss of the Boer republics.²⁴² It did, however, provide a ready-made constituency for his deputy, General Smuts, to use against Hertzog's neutrality policy when the occasion arose (as it would in September 1939) and also restrained Hertzog from adopting a more explicitly neutral position.²⁴³

In Australia, sentiment divided on, rather than across, party lines, with the governing coalition being more instinctively pro-British than the Labor opposition. Moreover, Labor's anti-British voice was divided against itself, springing, as it did, from Irish Catholic, Australian particularist, and Marxist sympathiser sources, which often could not agree among themselves on the issues of the day, such as the Spanish Civil War.²⁴⁴ In New Zealand, Anglophile sentiment was believed to be so strong, that government and opposition each vied to portray themselves as more pro-British than the other. Indeed, as late as August 1939, the opposition still saw mileage in trying to depict the Savage government as critical of Munich, as the British High Commissioner reported to London.²⁴⁵

British military and political power were also important for the dominions. Neatby notes that Mackenzie King was 'ambivalent' about the United States and while he might seek to use every opportunity to demonstrate Canada's independence from Britain, he also saw the link with Britain as vital, because 'were Britain to be worsted in a world struggle, the only future left for Canada would be absorption by the United States, if we were to be saved from an enemy aggressor' and 'if we ever cease to depend on our reliance on the British fleet... and place our whole reliance on the United States, there would be no independent Canada left; if Canada was left at all it would be as one of the States of the American Republic.'²⁴⁶ Australia and New Zealand, albeit with increasing misgivings, depended for their security on Britain's Singapore strategy to protect them from Japanese ambitions in the Southern Pacific.

Together with South Africa, they had also received former German colonies as mandates from the League of Nations as part of the peace settlement. Only New Zealand appeared prepared to consider the return of its mandate to Germany, but added the caveat at the 1937

²⁴² Oswald Pirow, *Hertzog*, pp. 247 - 8

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 226

²⁴⁴ See, for instance, Serle, G., 'Curtin, John (1885 - 1945)' in *Australian Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A130616b.htm>

²⁴⁵ TNA DO/35/576/705/66/Batterbee to Inskip, 4 August 1939

²⁴⁶ Neatby, *Prism of Unity*, p. 295; King, *Diary*, 27 September 1938; *ibid.*, 19 January 1939.

Imperial Conference that they would consider 'the interests of the inhabitants as the first and primary consideration,' a proviso which, given the extreme racial policy of the Nazis, left the idea dead in the water.²⁴⁷ South Africa went even further and refused to contemplate the return of Tanganyika, a British, not South African, mandate. The dominions all appear to have taken a revival of German interest in their former colonies as an imminent and serious threat. General Smuts might have had an interest in building up the danger, but General Hertzog certainly did not, yet the latter backed Smuts over the despatch of South African security forces to forestall a supposed German coup in South West Africa on Hitler's birthday in 1939.²⁴⁸ Hertzog would scarcely have done this, had he not taken seriously the idea that Germany would act, as playing up the threat strengthened the argument for greater co-operation with Britain, to which he was vehemently opposed. Pirow's disappointment at his failure to secure a colonial deal on his German visit is palpable, and again only makes sense in a context where the threat to South West Africa was seen as real.²⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Billy Hughes took the trouble to declare publicly that Australia would never return New Guinea, and New Zealand, as has been seen, also made clear its intention to keep Samoa.²⁵⁰ None of this would have been necessary had they not taken seriously the view that Germany wished to repossess its former property. It was one thing, however, to refuse blithely to hand the mandates over; it was another thing to actually defend them. The German navy might be relatively weak compared to the Royal Navy, but it positively dwarfed even the combined navies of the Dominions, whose only substantial asset was a 10,000 ton Australian cruiser.²⁵¹ South Africa was in this respect the most vulnerable of all, possessing no naval forces of its own whatsoever.²⁵² In the security of their enjoyment of their mandates, the Dominions were reliant on 'the surest shield' that was the Royal Navy, as Smuts put it in a speech to the public.²⁵³

Additionally, concerns over 'land and blood' permeated the Dominions. The governments were aware that their predecessors had seized the land their people now lived on from its

²⁴⁷ M. J. Savage, as cited in *Imperial Conference*, 1937, Vol. 38, 11th Meeting, pp. 10 – 13, as cited in J. D. O'Shea, 'New Zealand's Attitude to and Relations with Germany to October 1938' in *New Zealand War Histories: Pre-War Foreign Policy*, (War History Branch, Dept. Of Internal Affairs, unpublished manuscript, November 1947, NZNL/MS/MSY-5965), p. 4.

²⁴⁸ Oswald Pirow, *Hertzog*, pp. 242 – 3.

²⁴⁹ See chapter two below.

²⁵⁰ W. M. Hughes, as cited in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 October 1938, p. 11.

²⁵¹ Mansergh P. N. S., *Survey* p. 429

²⁵² NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.107/Cayzer, Sir Charles, as cited in the *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 December 1938

²⁵³ NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.107/Smuts, J. C. as cited in *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 December 1938, p. 11

indigenous inhabitants, on the grounds that it was *terra nullius*, and now looked towards their wide, open spaces with anxiety, lest a new *Volk ohne Raum* sought to displace them in turn. In Australia, *The Bulletin* reflected these concerns in a cartoon depicting Labor as preaching isolation, while an indigenous person looks on with the comment 'You pinchum OUR policy.'²⁵⁴ The implication is clear: an under-populated and isolated Australia was likely to be overrun by a more powerful nation with a surplus population, most probably Japan, although this was left to the imagination rather than openly stated. This was reinforced by secret government documents on strategy, which depicted Australia as empty and vulnerable, and specifically identified Japan as a likely potential aggressor.²⁵⁵ Similarly, across the Tasman, a *New Zealand Herald* cartoon depicted the Prime Minister in conversation with Bishop Cherrington. The bishop advocates Japanese immigration 'to settle the country.'²⁵⁶ The then attorney-general in a confidential report for the government, who were considering legal action over the item, interpreted this to be a play on words: the immigrants would settle the country as in populating it, but they would also settle the question of its future as a 'white man's country.'²⁵⁷ The underlying assumption is again clear: the country was empty and at risk of being overrun by an alien race which would impose its own values on the existing inhabitants. That this is also what had happened to the Maori cannot have been entirely lost on the audience. Canada, or at least Mackenzie King, also feared its emptiness, with the Prime Minister speaking in his diary of 'the large available areas for settlement,' although it is not clear which he feared more, the 'gangster nations' of Japan and Germany, who were 'seeking to work up a case against Canada, so that in the event of war, there may be an excuse for action against this country', or, as has been seen, his powerful neighbour to the South.²⁵⁸ The South African situation was different from the rest. There was no obvious candidate from which an influx of surplus population might be expected but, it was the only dominion in which settlers of European descent formed a minority.²⁵⁹ The enemy without was replaced by the enemy within, exacerbating tensions.

²⁵⁴ 'The Isolationists' in *The Bulletin*, 20/10/37 as reproduced in Meaney, N., *Australia and the World: A Documentary History from the 1870s to the 1970s*, (Melbourne, 1985), 224, p. 437

²⁵⁵ NAA, MP/729/2, File 1855/1/42, 'Report of the Conference of Senior Military Officers, constituted by the Minister for Defence on 22/1/1920 to advise on the Military Defence of Australia', Part II, point 8 as reproduced in Meaney, N., *Australia and the World: A Documentary History from the 1870s to the 1970s*, (Melbourne, 1985), 161, p. 294

²⁵⁶ 'The Big Question' in the *New Zealand Herald*, 15 July 1938 as reproduced in NANZ, Nash/1177.0345

²⁵⁷ NANZ, Nash/1177.0332, 'The Law of Libel – Political Cartoons', Report by the Attorney-General, 4 August 1938

²⁵⁸ King, *Diary*, 14 November & 9 December 1938

²⁵⁹ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers/D60/Clark*, Sir William, *Race Relations*, p. 15

The solution for all was to be, at least in times of prosperity, the encouragement of desirable immigrants to settle the land, under the implicit protection of the British fleet.

The dominions also shared the view that the Versailles settlement was unsatisfactory. All except Billy Hughes, the Australian Minister for External Affairs, were united in seeing it as too harsh. He alone had been unapologetic about the punitive nature of the treaty, and saw no need for revision now.²⁶⁰ His colleagues viewed things differently. Casey and Menzies had separately urged that more pressure be placed on the Czechs, Page had argued for the outright cession of the Sudetenland and Lyons, with his pacifist sympathies simply opposed Hughes's bellicosity on principle.²⁶¹ For South Africa, General Smuts had seen flaws in the treaty from the start and had only signed it under protest, while General Hertzog identified the settlement with the treaty of Vereeniging at which the Boers had surrendered their independence and to which he had been a reluctant signatory.²⁶² Mackenzie King likewise spoke in his diary of 'the wrongs done the Germans by the Versailles Treaty.'²⁶³ Even New Zealand, while deploring the aggression of recent years, also acknowledged in an internal memorandum, produced in the wake of Munich, that some of the aggressors were 'justifiably indignant because of grievances which should have been rectified long ago', suggesting that they, too, would support a revision of Versailles, just not at the end of a gun.²⁶⁴ This was all based on a conception of Hitler as a rational, if volatile, statesman with limited and intelligible ambitions. Hertzog and Smuts both perceived the German leader as being capricious, but characterised by aims arising from a standard contemporary definition of Germany's interests in terms of trade and influence in its natural hinterland.²⁶⁵ Mackenzie King had also believed a direct approach to Germany might 'reach Hitler's heart' and lead to 'a noble peace understanding', which, even if expressed in his diary in rather quixotic terms, still implicitly presumed that Hitler's aims were finite and compatible with Western

²⁶⁰ NLA/Munro-Ferguson papers/Ms696/548-52/Letter from W. M. Hughes to Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, Governor-General, 17/5/19 as reproduced in Meaney, N., *Australia and the World: A Documentary History from the 1870s to the 1970s*, (Melbourne, 1985), 156, p. 285

²⁶¹ TNA, DO/35/554/F82/100/Acting High Commissioner Canberra to Dominions Office, 2 September 1938; NLA/Menzies Papers (MS4936)/Menzies to Halifax, 6 August 1938, p. 2; see also chapter two below; Page, Sir Earle as cited in TNA, DO/35/554/82/69, Note of Meeting between Dominions Office, Lord Halifax, the Dominion High Commissioners and visiting Australian Ministers, 25 May 1938, p. 14; TNA, DO/35/554/82/96/Acting UK High Commissioner in Canberra to Dominions Office, 31 August 1938.

²⁶² Smuts, J. C., *J. C. Smuts*, (London, 1952), p. 234; Oswald Pirow, *Hertzog*, p. 247

²⁶³ King, *Diary*, 125/655, Entry 5 September 1938

²⁶⁴ NANZ, EA/1/58.8.1.1 pt. 1a/External Relations – General/Explanation of New Zealand Foreign Policy, p. 2

²⁶⁵ See, for instance, NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/Hertzog to Te Water, 21 April 1939, p. 2 & NASA, *Smuts Papers*(A1)/Vol.243/Smuts to M. C. Gillett 22/7/38, p. 2

security.²⁶⁶ In Australia, Lyons publicly avowed ‘that the powers represented at Munich are united in their desire for peace and are determined to spare the world the horrors of another war,’ an opinion in which he was supported to some extent at one time or another by Casey, Menzies and Page, but not, of course, Hughes.²⁶⁷ Lyons’s stance was built on the assumption that Hitler, as well as the other leaders, was essentially peaceful, that his aims did not require war, and that they were limited to issues which did not imperil Western security. In contrast, New Zealand’s focus on the need for opening up the German economy to world trade did not depend on Hitler’s reasonableness *per se*, but instead assumed that improving the German standard of living through ‘fairer’ access to world resources would dissipate the pressures driving Germany’s aggressive behaviour, restoring a harmonious international climate.²⁶⁸ They thus reached the same end as the others, but by slightly different means and with the assumption that it was underlying German economic needs, rather than Hitler’s political ones, which needed to be addressed. Accordingly, the dominions, while not quite united in their beliefs, nonetheless shared a perception that war could be avoided safely by satisfying Germany’s reasonable requirements.

There was, however, less agreement how all outstanding grievances could be resolved. General Hertzog, with the backing of General Smuts, favoured a conference to draw up a general settlement including colonial matters, but they preferred to proceed in tandem with Great Britain on this subject, and they continued to envisage resolution of the colonial question through financial compensation as regards their own position in South West Africa, as Hertzog advised Chamberlain in October 1938.²⁶⁹ Lyons likewise expressed the hope that Munich would lead to a general settlement of outstanding grievances.²⁷⁰ In New Zealand, Berendsen deprecated the idea of a conference in a memorandum for his government at this point: ‘Unless the present situation should lead (which would appear to be highly improbable) to a successful international conference for the solution of all international disputes present or potential.’²⁷¹ He disliked conferences on principle, considering them

²⁶⁶ King, *Diary*, 30 August 1938.

²⁶⁷ *The Daily Telegraph*, (Sydney) 1 October 1938, p. 2; Casey, R., 21 May 1937 as cited in TNA, DO/35/554/82/69, p. 41; National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA), *Menzies Papers* (MS4936), Box 579/Menzies to Halifax, 6 August 1938, p. 2; Page as cited in TNA, DO/35/554/82/69, Note of Meeting between Dominions Office, Lord Halifax, the Dominion High Commissioners and visiting Australian Ministers, 25 May 1938, p. 14.

²⁶⁸ Savage, M. J., 21 May 1937 & 3 June 1937 as cited in TNA, DO/35/576/F706/106, pp. 20 – 21.

²⁶⁹ NASA, *Smuts Papers* (A1), Vol.243/Smuts to M.C. Gillett 11 October 1938; NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14/Correspondence/J. B. M. Hertzog to N. Chamberlain 10 October 1938.

²⁷⁰ *The Daily Telegraph*, (Sydney) 3 October 1938, p. 2.

²⁷¹ NANZ, EA/1/85/1/1/Part 1/Post-Munich Reappraisal of New Zealand Foreign Policy by Berendsen for Savage, pp. 4 – 5.

prone to endless, futile discussions on the exact semantics of the proposals before them as he explained in his unpublished memoirs.²⁷² Yet, in a rare divergence of opinion on foreign policy, his masters do not appear to have agreed with him on this issue.²⁷³ Savage had called for a world conference twice at the Imperial Conference of 1937, and returned to the charge in March 1939, maintaining 'His Majesty's Government in New Zealand have always desired the holding of an international conference in the widest sphere and with the widest possible agenda.'²⁷⁴ It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that if they had supported one in 1937, and 'always' had done so in March 1939, that they would also have broadly supported one as envisaged by Hertzog in the autumn of 1938. That they themselves did not propose one at this point was probably more down to the exigencies of the New Zealand general election, than any temporary conversion to Berendsen's position. Of the heads of government, Mackenzie King alone seems to have agreed with Berendsen, preferring the direct approach of face-to-face meetings, as he noted in his diary.²⁷⁵

Overview

The Statute of Westminster had left dominion status open to interpretation. On the one hand they appeared to be sovereign, independent states, but they were presided over by a single crown, whose divisibility had never been authoritatively addressed. This anomalous state of affairs allowed London and the dominion elites to place their own individual interpretations on their constitutional status, each according to their own inclinations. This theoretical limbo could only persist, however, so long as no circumstances arose which would require a definitive stance to be adopted. Another world conflict would expose any irreconcilable differences in understanding and force the Commonwealth to assume unambiguous positions on the issue.

In the meantime ambiguity suited all parties. An undefined theoretical position allowed all parties to assert their own preferred stance as the correct one, without having to reconcile the incompatible aspects of their individual viewpoints. Different positions therefore did not arise out of diverse interpretations of dominion legal status: these disparate appreciations

²⁷² NLNZ, *McIntosh Papers* (MS6759-456), C.A. Berendsen, *Reminiscences of an Ambassador*, (Unpublished Autobiography), Book II, p. 18.

²⁷³ For an assessment of their usual unanimity, see NLNZ, *Bassett Papers* (MS2000-094-02), interview of Sir Alistair McIntosh and Ned Pharazyn by Mark King, 13 July 1988, p. 37.

²⁷⁴ TNA, DO/35/576/706/106/File note on history of Mr. Savage's proposals for a world conference, pp. 1 – 2; NANZ, EA/1/58/8/1/Part 1a/Telegram from Governor-General of New Zealand to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 21 March 1939.

²⁷⁵ King, *Diary*, 13 December 1938.

arose out of divergent views of the political and economic imperatives facing the dominions. Hertzog, via Pirow, Bodenstein and Havenga, and with the acquiescence of Smuts, sought to 'fuse' English and *Afrikaner* elements into a single South African identity. External affairs contributed to this scheme by providing an opportunity to create a Union perspective distinct from that of the Empire. Hertzog was aware that attempts to drive this forward without due consideration carried grave risks, but his inherent inability to empathise with his English fellow-citizens greatly complicated matters. His personal inclinations led him to conceal his true position behind the ploy that Parliament would decide, rather than risk failure by seeking to convert his English followers to his view. Superficially similar, but actually quite different, Mackenzie King likewise used the formula of Parliament deciding to conceal his real intent. However, the unity he sought was less all-embracing than Hertzog's "Fusion", but that is not the fundamental difference between them. Like Hertzog, he lacked empathy with his minority, but he sought to placate rather than cajole them, and engage with them to win them for participation, rather than to expect their unsolicited obedience for neutrality. Lurking in the background, his fantasies of saving the world through his connections, both living and dead, were, at the very least, in creative tension with the more practical aspects of his policy. New Zealand's 'moral foreign policy' was overturned by the new realities arising out of Munich, but its viability in the face of the need for Chamberlain's goodwill to solve their financial difficulties, and the distractions offered by internal dissent and the introduction of social security, was in any case highly questionable. Bereft of alternatives, the triumvirate would have to follow Britain more closely than previously. As with other aspects of policy, the leadership issue undermined attempts to develop an agreed stance on external affairs in Australia. Nonetheless, an emerging consensus can be discerned. All except Hughes expressed varying degrees of support for appeasement, and if any alternatives to participation in the event of its failure attracted support, evidence of this has yet to emerge.

The dominions had more than the uniqueness of their perspectives in common. All were dependent to a greater or lesser extent on access to British markets, even if this situation was complicated by trade with other nations. All contained elements who saw no contradiction in allegiance to the Empire and allegiance to their own country. All relied on Britain and its navy for their security. Canada, Australia and New Zealand feared that their relatively low population densities would attract the attention of more crowded aggressors. South Africa instead feared its internal non-European majority, rather than an external enemy. Australia, New Zealand and South Africa would also require British support to retain their former

German colonies if Hitler decided to move on these, while Canada needed the British connection to keep the United States at arm's length. None of them particularly liked the Versailles Settlement, but in the circumstances of October '38, had yet to come up with a plausible and mutually acceptable strategy for resolving outstanding grievances and eliminating international tensions. If the ambiguous nature of dominion status permitted a burgeoning independence as expressed through their diverging perspectives, then these common factors served to counter this development, by reinforcing dominion dependence on Britain.

Christie was, however, wrong in his assessment mentioned at the start of this chapter: the dominions were not "part-sovereign"; the ambiguities of the situation left them as theoretically sovereign as they chose to be. That this theoretical sovereignty was restricted by the practical political and economic realities of their situation was neither particularly new nor particularly unique. Both Britain and France found their sovereignty impaired by external factors at this time: Britain, through its strategic interest in French integrity, found its fate bound up with Czechoslovakia, a country it had scrupulously avoided entering into any engagements with; while France, through its requirement for British support, found its ability to honour a commitment it had solemnly entered into constrained by British reluctance to confront Germany. The dominions apparently had yet to learn that legal form did not necessarily translate into political substance. They were far more constrained by the concrete imperatives of their position than their ambiguous rights and obligations as members of the Commonwealth.

2: PRAGMATISM PREVAILS:

THE DOMINIONS AND THE 'SPIRIT OF MUNICH'

The Sudeten Crisis had forced the dominions to confront the imminence of war. None of them had welcomed this prospect. As tension rose between Berlin and Prague following the *Anschluss* of Austria on 13 March 1938, South Africa had indicated that they would not join in any war breaking out over Czechoslovakia, but, as non-participation would threaten their domestic harmony, they had also encouraged the British to seek a solution that would avoid hostilities.¹ The Australians had also been reluctant to support the Czechs but did not go as far as committing themselves to neutrality, as Te Water advised his government.² Despite the best efforts of Billy Hughes, Canberra had likewise argued in favour of pushing Prague into ever greater concessions in the search for a diplomatic solution.³ All the dominions had welcomed Chamberlain's efforts to seek a negotiated solution by meeting Hitler at Berchtesgaden on 15 September.⁴ When their second meeting at Bad Godesberg, the following week, had seemed likely to lead to the abandonment of appeasement, Bruce and Te Water had orchestrated a campaign to both pressure and support Chamberlain in the continuation of his efforts, which the British Prime Minister had used to help persuade his cabinet to acquiesce in his perseverance with the policy.⁵ Massey had encouraged this endeavour, but had remained in the background because of the sensitivity of his position, as outlined in the preceding chapter.⁶ Back home in Ottawa, Mackenzie King, had recorded in his diary his support for both Chamberlain and, in the event of war, Britain, but did not make the former information public until 27 September and kept the latter sentiment strictly to his cabinet and himself.⁷ The New Zealand government was in the midst of a general election and Jordan had also been away in Geneva on League of Nations' business until 27 September, so they had contributed comparatively little to dominion discussions with

¹ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/Hertzog to MacDonald, 5 May 1938, pp. 1-2; *Ibid.*, Te Water to Stanley, 23 June 1938.

² *Ibid.*, Te Water to Hertzog, 28 May 1938.

³ TNA, DO/35/554/82/101/Cable from British High Commissioner, Canberra to Dominions Office, 2 September 1938.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-5.

⁵ Fry, 'Agents and Structures' p. 326; R. Ovendale, 'Coming of the Second World War' in Mommsen & Kettenacker (eds.), *Fascist Challenge*, p. 333.

⁶ M. G. Fry, 'Agents and Structures' p. 329.

⁷ See, for instance, King, *Diary*, 31 August 1938, 23 September 1938 & 27 September 1938

London.⁸ Like the others, however, they had congratulated Chamberlain on the outcome of the Munich conference.⁹

The settlement reached there had removed the imminent prospect of war. It seemed that Europe's grievances could be solved through the 'wise statesmanship' of the great powers, after all, leading to a revival in confidence. This 'spirit of Munich' allowed optimists to look forward to an enduring new era of peace.¹⁰ In his 1999 article on the dominions and Munich, M.G. Fry implied the dominions had succumbed to this spirit, concluding the settlement had led, 'however briefly', to a continuation of their delusions about Hitler and the efficacy of appeasement.¹¹ Going forward, dominion attitudes to international relations would be shaped by their perception of this agreement, both as a resolution of the crisis itself, and its success in restoring the prospects for long-term peace. The extent to which they yielded to this spirit therefore matters. Their commitment to it can be assessed by reference to a number of matters. Such a 'spirit' was not compatible with the sense of shame which rapidly replaced relief at the avoidance of war for many contemporaries.¹² The settlement could not be viewed as both the triumph of reason over irrationality which had not happened in 1914, and the shameful abandonment of a small, friendly country, at one and the same time. The idealism implicit in the term 'spirit' also seemed to suggest that the beneficiaries of the Czechs' forbearance should now, in their turn, recompense the latter by assisting them in their hour of need. In addition, the expected improvement in international tension would seem to reduce the need for defence expenditure on the part of governments everywhere. Finally, this spirit seemed to indicate that those who held disputed territories should be prepared to renounce these in the interests of world peace, just as the Czechs had so nobly done. It is therefore worth examining the behaviour of the dominion governments in relation to these issues to assess how far they had indeed succumbed to this 'spirit of Munich.'

⁸ See previous chapter and below as well as TNA, DO/114/94, Czechoslovakia: Memoranda, Correspondence and Records of Meeting, March-October 1938, p. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-5.

¹⁰ Charles Te Water, the South African High Commissioner was particularly fond of the phrase, see, for instance, NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/C. Te Water to J. B. M. Hertzog, 22 November 1938.

¹¹ TNA, DO/114/94, Czechoslovakia: Memoranda, Correspondence and Records of Meeting, March-October 1938, p. 3

¹² See, for instance, Ian, Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-1945 Nemesis*, p. 91.

While Donald Cameron Watt uses an anecdote about his then headmaster to demonstrate Chamberlain's hold over Britain at the time, it can also be used to demonstrate a certain amount of disquiet with what had transpired. Watt wrote: 'People would tell us, he [Watt's headmaster] said, that what Mr. Chamberlain had done was dishonourable and wrong. We were not to believe them. He had been sent by God to preserve the peace of the world.'¹³ By dignifying the idea that Munich was 'dishonourable and wrong' with a response, the headmaster implicitly accords it a certain amount of credibility, and suggests that he was not altogether comfortable with what had happened. The dominion governments proved resistant to any idea of shame, however. New Zealand came closest, but private outrage, coupled with public reticence was the order of the day. Berendsen indicated in 1978 that their private reaction had been one of fury, tempered by relief at the avoidance of conflict.¹⁴ His analysis, though, came at a time when association with appeasement had strong negative overtones, and this may have coloured the relative emphases he placed on relief at, and hostility to, the agreement. Certainly at the time the Dominions Office chose to interpret the New Zealand attitude as generally supportive, if comparatively silent, on the crisis and its resolution, noting that an official telegram had been received from Wellington 'expressing their thankfulness that war had been averted and their hopes that the Munich Agreement might lead to a lasting peace.'¹⁵

As previously mentioned, New Zealand contributed relatively little to discussions during the crisis. Jordan spent from 12 to 27 September in Geneva as President of the Council of the League of Nations, and his deputy, Sandford, seems to have had little to say in his absence, beyond agreeing that in the event of an emergency, his chief would be able to return to London for consultation.¹⁶ As seen in the preceding chapter, Jordan was a notoriously difficult individual who guarded the prerogatives of his position jealously, so in the absence of definite instructions from his government, Sandford's reticence is perfectly understandable.¹⁷ Wellington was preoccupied at the time with the general election that would take place on 15 October 1938 and, in any case, was reluctant to offer guidance to

¹³ Watt, *How War Came*, p. 76

¹⁴ NLNZ, Bassett *Papers*/2000-094/13/Interview with Sir Carl Berendsen, January 1978, p. 8

¹⁵ TNA, DO/114/94, p. 5

¹⁶ TNA, DO/114/94, pp. 3 & 22

¹⁷ See previous chapter.

those more closely involved, as Joe Savage indicated to Lord Galway, the Governor-General, over the contemporary British proposal to revise the League of Nations' Covenant.¹⁸

As regards New Zealand being supportive, the Dominions Office cited statements from Savage and Peter Fraser on the 15th and 28th September respectively which, however, were relatively anodyne and were in any case delivered before the actual terms of the Munich Settlement had been agreed.¹⁹ Jordan advised his government against sending a congratulatory telegram to Chamberlain on his success in brokering peace, as the High Commissioner considered this would be used for party political purposes, but his cable arrived too late to prevent this happening.²⁰ Thereafter (whether out of objection to the terms of Munich, solidarity with their fellow socialists in the British Opposition, or because 'Party Capital' could be made elsewhere than London, and New Zealand ministers had a general election at home to take into account), there was a marked cooling in the Savage government's comments on Munich.²¹ Peter Fraser, for instance, rather than praising the settlement itself, confined himself to remarking on 2 October that 'all were grateful to Mr. Chamberlain for saving the world from worldwide bloodshed.'²² This had the merit of sounding positive, but fell somewhat short of endorsing the actual conditions agreed, which development was noted and criticised in the press.²³ There was, however, no actual public criticism of Munich by the government at the time and disapproval can only be inferred from the absence of any concrete endorsement of its terms.

In Canada, there was no suggestion of Munich being in any way dishonourable. Not only did Mackenzie King wax lyrical in his diary about Munich being 'the completion of the effort for which so many millions gave their lives in the Great War', he changed the names of the statues of Victory and Liberty for the still incomplete Canadian War Memorial to Peace and Freedom (as the latter were, in his view, 'finer concepts'), and arranged to have them placed in the Memorial Arch on the same date as the agreement 'for symbolic reasons.'²⁴ It was not just his ability to tie himself in verbal knots, however, that convinced MacKenzie King that Munich was an honourable arrangement that would usher in a new age

¹⁸ NANZ, EA/1/114/1/11/Part 3, Savage to Galway, 10 September 1938

¹⁹ TNA, DO/35/114/94, pp. 3 - 4

²⁰ NANZ, PM/16/1/ Pre-1939 Savage, Fraser and Jordan Correspondence/Jordan to Savage 1 October 1938

²¹ See, for instance, National Party advert in *The Evening Post*, 5 October 1938, p. 5; NANZ, PM/16/1/ Pre-1939 Savage, Fraser and Jordan Correspondence/Jordan to Savage 1 October 1938

²² P. Fraser, as cited in *The Evening Post*, 3 October 1938, p. 10

²³ D. M. Fell, as cited in *The New Zealand Herald*, 5 October 1938, Letters to the Editor, p. 17

²⁴ King, *Diary*, 29 September 1938, 30 September 1938 & 4 October 1938.

of peace, his personal vanity played a part as well. Reviewing his correspondence with Chamberlain, he allowed himself to believe, as he put it in his diary, that he had seen 'the whole problem in its true perspective from the start.'²⁵ He felt his letters had been 'truly remarkable and prophetic.' He only lamented that the British had not joined him in contacting Hitler earlier, which he was sure would have prevented the unpalatably aggressive aspects of the *Anschluss* and the Sudeten Crisis. He then proceeded to go on holiday, with his chief official, Skelton, and if his diary indicates he turned somewhat against the Nazis (but not Hitler, who he continued to view as redeemable), it appears that this was due more to the book he was reading than anything to do with Munich.²⁶ Certainly, after his return he confided in his private record on 23 November 1938 his abiding belief that 'Chamberlain had saved the day.'²⁷

The South African elite likewise gave no indication of any sense of shame over Czechoslovakia's treatment. As has previously been seen, Hertzog had already expressed a complete lack of interest in the fate of the Czechs and other Eastern European peoples and there is nothing to suggest that Munich had done anything to change his mind.²⁸ On the contrary, in a letter dated 10 October 1938 to Chamberlain on the international situation, he avoided mentioning the Czechs at all.²⁹ It might be thought that this is evidence of a certain discomfort over their treatment, but the tone of the letter, in sharp contrast to the defensiveness of Watt's headmaster, was sufficiently bullish to suggest otherwise. Not only did he praise Chamberlain's efforts in achieving agreement at Munich, he also urged the latter to continue in this vein in an effort to achieve a general settlement, thereby cementing world peace and, implicitly, South African domestic harmony. Pirow likewise relegated the Czechs to an off-stage presence, meriting no attention in his 1958 biography of his Prime Minister. As previously mentioned, he described the latter's eastern European thinking as being characterised by 'a conception of a resurrected Germany as a bulwark against Russia.'³⁰ Pirow clearly approved of this stance, going on to describe the consequences of the West's rejection of this policy with the remark: 'today, we are in a position to judge the result the destruction of Germany for the world and that of Fusion for South Africa. In other

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 October 1938

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8 October 1938; See, for instance, *Ibid.*, 26 January 1939, 29 January 1939 and 1 February 1939; Eva Lips, *Savage Symphony: A Personal Record Of The Third Reich*, tr. Caroline Newton, (Random House, 1938) as cited in King, *Diary*, 19 October 1938

²⁷ King, *Diary*, 23 November 1938

²⁸ See previous chapter.

²⁹ NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.48/Correspondence/J. B. M. Hertzog to N. Chamberlain 10 October 1938

³⁰ Pirow, *Hertzog*, p. 222

words history has proved on the 4th of September 1939 Hertzog was right.³¹ Clearly, he was addressing here the circumstances of the Cold War under which he was writing, rather than those of the 1930s. Nonetheless, the 1950s was when the 'Guilty Men' thesis held sway, so it is telling that he made no attempt to distance Hertzog from the policy of appeasement, but instead sought to repackage it in a form palatable for a contemporary audience. Pirow clearly saw no reason to condemn appeasement then, and if he felt that way in 1958, it is unlikely he would have felt differently in 1938. Likewise Smuts does not seem to have felt the settlement to be in any way dishonourable at the time. He certainly felt sorry for the Czechs, but, as he indicated in a private letter to Margaret Gillett, on 1 October 1938, for him also, 'world peace rank(s) above all territorial issues.'³² There was only regret here, no sense of guilt, as he concluded in a letter to her ten days later: 'I do not think a world war was justified over Czechoslovakia.'³³

In a speech to the Chamber of Manufacturers on 3 October, Bob Menzies indicated that the Australian Government was united in its appreciation of Chamberlain, not just because he had preserved world peace, but because he had left British honour 'unsullied.'³⁴ It would hardly have done for a member of the Australian administration to have publicly criticised the British Prime Minister, but Menzies could have confined himself to an expression of gratitude for the avoidance of war, without any mention of honour (as Peter Fraser had done in New Zealand the previous day), had he disapproved of what had transpired. Menzies, however, was extremely unlikely to do this, as he had been a vigorous advocate of pressurising the Czechs to make concessions: a stance he now attributed to the whole government.³⁵ Whether it was as united as Menzies made out is rather more open to question: Page certainly mouthed the customary platitudes, describing it as 'a satisfactory compromise between widely conflicting points of view' (again, it would have been unlikely for him to do otherwise, as he had already argued for cession of the Sudetenland in the interests of Australian trade), but Billy Hughes, who could scarcely be expected to go along willingly with something as non-confrontational as appeasement, was ominously silent on the matter of honour, confining himself to ominous prognostications on the temporary nature

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 248

³² NASA, *Smuts Papers*(A1), Vol.243/Smuts to M.C. Gillett 1 October 1938.

³³ NASA, *Smuts Papers*(A1), Vol.243/Smuts to M.C. Gillett 11 October 1938.

³⁴ *The Argus*, (Melbourne) 4 October 1938, p. 12.

³⁵ See for instance, NLA, Menzies Papers (MS4936), Menzies to Halifax, 6 August 1939., p. 2.

of the relief from the 'dark clouds' threatening peace.³⁶ Lyons himself publicly expressed profound satisfaction with the agreement and hoped that it would lead on to a general settlement that would peacefully resolve all outstanding problems, before 'going gaily off to golf' and then a three week break from politics.³⁷ The strain of the previous weeks seemed to have brought him close to the edge, although there is no hint of this in the press coverage. It is therefore doubtful that he fully appreciated the terms of the agreement when making his comments. Given his pacifist inclinations and his previous urging for Chamberlain to go the extra mile, however, it is difficult to believe he would not approve of what had transpired.

Shame could also be rationalised away. Many depicted Czechoslovakia as Christ crucified in the wake of Munich, echoing the words used by the Czechs to signify their capitulation: correspondents to the editors of the *Argus* and the *Advertiser* in Australia, for instance, considered 'Czechoslovakia's Crown of Thorns signifies the worthiness of the crowned'; and referred to 'the Czechs willingness to be crucified.'³⁸ The accusations of bad faith, the doubts as to the probity of keeping Germans Czech, the horror at fighting over how, not if or which, German areas should be integrated into Germany, were all forgotten in a sanctimonious eulogising of the Czechs and their noble sacrifice. The imagery was telling: Christ was the saviour, not the victim, of Christendom. No mention was made of Pilate. Depicting the Czechs in this way therefore created a guilt-free version of events: they had nobly sacrificed themselves to save the peace of the world, not been abandoned by others. Unsurprisingly, dissenting voices, such as the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Press* in New Zealand did not pursue this imagery: instead remarking sourly that: 'not all the heartfelt rejoicings over the avoidance of war will be able to banish a sense of resentment and misgiving' and "the manner in which the settlement has been made is as repugnant as some of its terms.'³⁹ Such limited criticisms, however, were lonely protests amidst a widespread consensus of euphoria at the averting of hostilities. Some, of course hedged their bets: *The Advertiser* warned of the future prospects for peace that 'Germany's past campaigns of abuse and hatred against the democracies do not encourage the wildest optimism', before noting that these were avowedly

³⁶ Page, as cited in *The Herald*, (Melbourne), 5 October 1938, p. 3; Page, as cited in TNA, DO/35/554/82/69, Note of Meeting between Dominions Office, Lord Halifax, the Dominion High Commissioners and visiting Australian Ministers, 25 May 1938, p. 14; W. M. Hughes, as cited in *The Advertiser*, (Adelaide), 6 October 1938, p. 11.

³⁷ *The Daily Telegraph*, (Sydney) 1 October 1938, p. 2; *The Argus*, (Melbourne) 4 October 1938, p. 3

³⁸ A. W. Martin, assisted by Hardy P., *Robert Menzies: A Life*, Vol. 1, 1894 – 1943, (Melbourne, 1993), p. 237; J. J. W. Caulfield, as cited in *The Argus*, (Melbourne), 5 October 1938, Letters to the Editor, p. 4; K. R., Lang, as cited in *The Advertiser*, (Adelaide), 13 October 1938, Letters to the Editor, p. 22.

³⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October 1938, p. 10; *The Press*, 1 October 1938, p. 16.

tactics to obtain ends in Europe which were now declared accomplished, and that 'if that is so', then 'it is a wonderful prospect to dwell upon with hope.'⁴⁰

Munich's legacy of obligation

The image of noble sacrifice did raise problems of its own. If the Czechs had saved world peace through their renunciation of the Sudetenland, was the world not under a commensurate obligation to do something for the Czechs? Such was indeed acknowledged: the *New Zealand Herald* considered the guaranteeing of the new Czech frontiers a 'vital' aspect of the Munich Agreement, an aspect which *The Press* of Christchurch argued rendered it necessary for Britain to take the lead in the economic reconstruction of Czechoslovakia.⁴¹ In South Africa, General Smuts grudgingly conceded 'I dare say some such *quid pro quo* [the guarantee] was demanded by France and the occasion.'⁴² In Australia, Lyons believed 'public opinion will require adequate assurances for the future of Czechoslovakia', while, in Canada, Mackenzie King considered 'that they should be dealt with very chivalrously and generously by other nations.'⁴³ Clearly by 'other nations', Mackenzie King meant nations other than the Czechs, but a cynic might argue that this actually turned out to mean nations other than Canada. Certainly an obligation spread so widely would fall so lightly on each as to be indistinguishable from nothing, and nothing was very close to what the dominions actually delivered, for all the rhetoric that was outpoured.

Munich had left the Czechs with three outstanding needs: security, finance, and a permanent home for those displaced by the German annexation of the Sudetenland. London had already conceded, in a meeting with the High Commissioners on 19 September 1938, that the proposed British guarantee of the rump of Czechoslovakia, like Locarno, placed no obligation on the dominions, and the minutes record that obligingly 'none of the dominion representatives expressed any criticism.'⁴⁴ Only Australia's Bruce spoke in favour of the dominions joining in the guarantee and Te Water made it clear South Africa would not countenance such a move.⁴⁵ MacDonald recognised the impossibility of Bruce's proposal (as

⁴⁰ *The Advertiser*, (Adelaide) 1 October 1938, p. 22.

⁴¹ *New Zealand Herald*, (Auckland), 3 October 1938, p. 10; *The Press*, (Christchurch), 5 October 1938, p. 10.

⁴² NASA, *Smuts Papers*(A1), Vol.243/J. C. Smuts to M. C. Gillett 1 October 1938.

⁴³ TNA, DO/114/94, Lyons to Chamberlain, 26 September 1938; King, *Diary*, 126/746 - 7, Entry 30 September 1938.

⁴⁴ TNA, DO/35/114/94 Note of Meeting between UK & Dominion representatives 19 September 1938.

⁴⁵ *Idem*.

did Bruce) but tried to get Lyons via Bruce to express Australia's 'warm approval' of British actions.⁴⁶ Whether Lyons proved amenable or not is not clear, as he cancelled the statement he had been due to make in the House on international relations on the 20th September on the grounds 'that a premature statement or even a loose word, might well imperil the peace of the world.'⁴⁷ The Cabinet minutes of the same date merely refer to a 'general discussion' of the situation in Europe without reference to any decision being taken.⁴⁸ The one dominion which had appeared most supportive of the British stance in private, therefore could not be brought (for whatever reason) to endorse (let alone subscribe to) it in public.

The problem for the dominions was that this theoretical lack of obligation was largely cosmetic. The guarantee appeared to oblige Britain to go to war to defend the integrity of the remainder of Czechoslovakia. Such a war would mean the end of the Fusion regime in South Africa. General Hertzog, as has been seen, did not see any South African interest in such a war and was determined to keep his country neutral in those circumstances.⁴⁹ The guarantee, therefore, could only be reconciled with his interests in as much as it was necessary to avoid a conflict now, albeit at the expense of a possible war later. His colleague, Smuts, also did not like the guarantee, describing it in a private letter to Margaret Gillett as 'a very risky departure,' although wondering (correctly) whether anything would come of it, albeit as a consequence of Poland and Hungary's imminent depredations, rather than a renewal of Germany's appetite six months down the line.⁵⁰ Obligations in Eastern Europe also left Britain less able to fulfil the Singapore strategy on which Australian security depended. They further raised the spectre of a confrontation with Italy (through the latter's German connection), to which Canberra remained fundamentally opposed (as the Italian navy and empire lay firmly astride Australia's communications with the mother country, and also promised to divert British naval priorities from Singapore to the Mediterranean).⁵¹ Again the guarantee was not in Australian interests (as identified by the principal participants) except in so far as it contributed to the avoidance of confrontation now, even at the increased risk of a possible hostilities later. Meanwhile, New Zealand may not have liked appeasement, but, this did not mean that they welcomed war. Berendsen recalled long afterwards 'I shared the government's anger over Munich, but we were also very relieved that there was some hope

⁴⁶ TNA, DO/35/114/94 Note of Meeting between MacDonald & Bruce 19 September 1938.

⁴⁷ J. A. Lyons, as cited in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 September 1938, p. 12.

⁴⁸ NAA, A2694/Vol. 18/Part 5/Minutes, 20 September 1938.

⁴⁹ See previous chapter.

⁵⁰ NASA, *Smuts Papers*(A1), 243/Smuts to M.C. Gillett 1 October 1938; NASA, *Smuts Papers*(A1), 243/Smuts to M.C. Gillett 11 October 1938.

⁵¹ See previous chapter.

that war would be avoided after all.⁵² The triumvirates' instinctive anti-war inclinations practically ensured this would be their view. There was also a pragmatic reason for being relieved. The failure of collective security left them as reliant on the Singapore strategy as Australia, even though they were less concerned about antagonising Italy. This new guarantee would therefore leave them as exposed as their neighbours. Only Canada benefited and then only cosmetically. The avoidance of technical obligations meant Mackenzie King could still maintain the polite fiction that Parliament would decide on Canada's neutrality or otherwise in the event of war. This did not, however, change the fundamental realities. The Canadian leader had acknowledged his government would have fallen if he had not supported Britain in any war over the Sudetenland and that in any case, he would have resigned rather than remain neutral in such a situation.⁵³ It is difficult to envisage under what circumstances the guarantee would be put into operation, where these two factors would not also apply, and therefore, in practical terms, the British had just extended Canadian obligations, but without consulting them or obtaining their consent. The guarantee did therefore adversely affect the dominions, but there was little they could do about it, as the British only informed the High Commissioners after the guarantee had been decided on.⁵⁴ The latter's general lack of enthusiasm for this measure, however, served to demonstrate that there were distinct limits to the goodwill that the Czechs' anticipated 'noble sacrifice' might be expected to generate.

After Munich Czechoslovakia urgently needed financial support. The loss of economically important areas in the Sudetenland, together with the displacement of refugees from the Nazis placed an added burden on the rump Czech state. Certainly a plethora of popular appeals was inaugurated to raise funds for the Czechs, but, as E. M. Andrews points out, their success in Australia contrasted unfavourably with that of a purely local one for a war veterans' home.⁵⁵ The dominion governments proved even less generous than the public. New Zealand's silence when the others pressed for the Czechs to be pushed into concessions meant that it was perhaps under less of a moral obligation to contribute than the others. In any case, its dire financial situation ruled out any such assistance.⁵⁶ Australia also faced straitened financial circumstances. As early as 1937, Lyons had been fretting about National Insurance and defence and the tremendous burden they were likely to impose on the nation's

⁵² NLNZ, Bassett *Papers* (MS2000-094), 13, Interview with Sir Carl Berendsen, January 1978, p. 8.

⁵³ See previous chapter.

⁵⁴ TNA, DO/35/114/94 Note of Meeting between UK & Dominion representatives 19 September 1938

⁵⁵ Andrews, E.M., *Isolationism and Appeasement in Australia: Reactions to the European Crises, 1935 – 1939*, (Canberra, 1970), p. 143

⁵⁶ See previous chapter.

finances over the coming years, and correspondents were already urging him to drop the former in favour of the latter.⁵⁷ South Africa's position was better (Havenga, the Minister of Finance, had to worry about the size of his surpluses, rather than deficits, when it came to preparing the budget), but it was not itself a financial centre, depending instead on the City of London to fund its industrial expansion.⁵⁸ Canada lay outside the Sterling area based on the City of London, but was equally not a centre of finance in the way the latter was. In any case, it does not appear to have occurred to Mackenzie King that 'other nations' dealing 'chivalrously and generously' with the Czechs might go so far as to involve Canada in actually incurring expenses on their behalf. The British and French therefore sought to remedy the Czech situation themselves by together providing a loan of approximately £16 million.⁵⁹ The dominions were neither asked, nor did they offer, to provide any assistance in connection with this.

The refugees created not only a financial burden for the Czechs, but also a physical one as they would have to be permanently re-settled somewhere. These unfortunates were identified as belonging to two groups: ethnic Czechs unwanted by the Third Reich; and dissident Germans who might prove all too wanted. The Czechs soon dropped out of international consideration, as the Anglo-French loan was at least in part to be utilised to alleviate their plight.⁶⁰ The Germans were a different matter. It was recognised that they would be unwelcome in Czechoslovakia: as a potential fifth column which might be used to destabilise it in future; as a source of anti-Nazi agitation which might aggravate future relations with the Reich; and as an exacerbation of the unemployment issue.⁶¹ It might also be thought that their membership of the nation which had just humiliated their host country would likewise render their position somewhat precarious. With the introduction of the Option Agreement between Berlin and Prague on 24 November 1938, this became even more so, as it stipulated that Sudeten Germans could not opt to become Czech citizens, meaning they were liable to be deported to the Reich, even if the Czechs had no immediate intentions of doing so.⁶² Estimates varied as to their numbers. Jordan wrote of an army of 100,000 German Sudetenlanders who had been organised to resist Hitler in a report to Wellington, but this

⁵⁷ NAA, CP290/5/3/Lyons to Page, 29/5/37; see, for instance, NLA/*Lyons Papers* (MS4851)/2/12/Laverty, J. W., to Lyons, 27 October 1938

⁵⁸ NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32)/Vol.123/*Cape Times*, 2 August 1939.

⁵⁹ NAA, A981/Ref/8/Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Circular Telegram No. B.27, 27 January 1939

⁶⁰ LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/327/3/Blair, F. C. to Skelton, O. D. S., 9 December 1939; NAA, A981/4/Ref/8/Devonshire to Bruce, 1 November 1938

⁶¹ NAA, A981/4/Ref/8/Hood, J. D. L., to Hodgson, 14 October 1938

⁶² NAA, A981/4/Ref/8/Devonshire to Bruce

was clearly a gross exaggeration and was not repeated.⁶³ Official estimates initially suggested 15,000, but this was quickly revised to 3,000 - 3,500, amounting to some 1,500 families.⁶⁴ Of the urgent cases, Britain, due to pressure from the Czechs, agreed temporarily to take 350; France, 200; Norway, 500; Finland, 100; and Belgium, 300.⁶⁵

Here was something the dominions, with their wide, open spaces could be expected to help with and Bruce, Massey, Te Water and Jordan were duly asked by the Duke of Devonshire (Undersecretary of State at the Dominions Office) if there was anything their governments could do.⁶⁶ Massey reported to Ottawa on 25 November 1938 that in response Te Water had

emphasised his government had already done a great deal in receiving refugees and stated that special consideration to the above German Social Democrats could only be given on the ground that they constituted an immediate and urgent problem to solve which special action would be necessary.⁶⁷

At first glance, this appears quite positive, seeming to suggest that the Union was prepared to give 'special consideration' to the Sudeten German refugees as part of a 'special action' to resolve this 'immediate and urgent problem.' Actually all Te Water had indicated was that treating the Sudeten Germans as a special case could only be justified if it was held that these were exceptional circumstances requiring extraordinary measures. As the 'great deal' that the Union had previously done for refugees included being the only dominion to send an observer rather than a delegate to the Evian Conference (which had met at the instigation of Roosevelt to try to co-ordinate an international response to the ever-increasing number of Jews fleeing persecution in Germany), the chances of Pretoria treating the situation as one requiring exceptional action on their part were not good. There in fact appeared to be no appetite to regard the situation as 'immediate and urgent' requiring 'special action' or 'special consideration.' When a group of Sudeten Jewish families tried to apply as a group to enter the Union, for instance, they were told that they must apply individually, that each case would be treated on its merits, and no indication was given in the internal

⁶³ NANZ, PM/16/1/ Pre-1939 Savage, Fraser and Jordan Correspondence/Undated letter from Jordan to Savage

⁶⁴ NAA, A981/Ref/8/Hood, D. L., to Hodgson, 14 October 1938; NAA, A981/Ref/8/Untitled Memorandum, 31 October 1938; LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/3/ Blair, F. C. to Skelton, O. D. S., 14 December 1939, & Massey to Mackenzie King, 2 December 1939., p. 2.

⁶⁵ LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/2/Massey to Mackenzie King, 11 November 1938.

⁶⁶ See previous chapter; LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/3/Massey to Devonshire, 1 December 1939; LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/2/Massey to Mackenzie King, 25 November 1938.

⁶⁷ Te Water, C., as cited in LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/2/Massey to Mackenzie King, 25 November 1938, p. 2.

correspondence between departments in Pretoria that any attempt would be made to note, let alone take account of the special circumstances of the Sudeten case.⁶⁸

The other dominions at least appeared interested in the refugees, but seemed more concerned with what the latter could bring to their adoptive country than in their plight. In New Zealand, Walter Nash was provided with a suggestion by his private secretary (the economist, Dr. W. B. Sutch) that the situation provided an ideal opportunity to acquire workers who would be of use in developing secondary industries.⁶⁹ It is not clear whether the former agreed, but the government did decide to accept up to 207 'German Democrats' with skills in the building trade, of which there was then a shortage in New Zealand.⁷⁰ In Australia, compassion was not a primary concern, as the minister responsible declared in the House: 'it is not the intention of the government to issue permits for entry influenced by the necessity of individual cases.'⁷¹ Instead the government saw it as an opportunity to acquire 'valuable citizens,' who could be absorbed in trades or occupations without detriment to Australian workers.⁷² Like Dr. Sutch in New Zealand, Australia was also interested in migrants who had either, or both, the capital and experience to establish new industries in the country.⁷³ Additionally Lyons was concerned that communists be identified, together with an appreciation as to whether such an individual was likely to advocate the overthrow of the government and why the Soviets would not take them, which at least suggests he would have been prepared to accept some types of communist.⁷⁴ Duncan (Acting High Commissioner, in Bruce's absence) collected assurances from Whitehall that the 'Sudeten Aryan German Democrats' were 'almost certainly' not communists and that the reason the Soviet Union was declining to accept any refugees was its paranoia about foreigners, particularly Germans.⁷⁵ The Canadians were also open to admitting these refugees, explicitly acknowledging a debt to the Czechs, as King described in his diary (although only in the

⁶⁸ NASA, SAB/BNS/1/1/386/212/74C/Jewish and Other Refugees/Political Secretary, South African High Commission, to UK Passport Control Office, Prague, 21 October 1938; NASA, SAB/BNS/1/1/386/212/74C/Jewish and Other Refugees/Secretary of the Interior, to Secretary for External Affairs, Pretoria, 10 November 1938.

⁶⁹ NANZ, Nash/1311/Sutch, W. B., to Nash, W, 28 October 1938.

⁷⁰ NANZ, Nash/1311/Nash, W, to Wilson, D., 27 March 1939; NANZ, Nash/1311/Nash, W, to Hall, Mrs. J., 21 March 1939.

⁷¹ NAA, A981/4/Ref/1/Transcript forwarded by Lyons to St. Vincent de Paul Society, Dublin, 12 December 1939.

⁷² *Idem*; NAA, A981/4/Ref/8/Lyons to Duncan, 23 December 1939.

⁷³ NAA, A981/4/Ref/1/Transcript forwarded by Lyons to St. Vincent de Paul Society, Dublin, 12 December 1939.

⁷⁴ NAA, A981/4/Ref/8/Lyons to Duncan, 5 January 1939

⁷⁵ NAA, A981/4/Ref/8/ Duncan to Lyons, 17 January 1939

privacy of cabinet deliberations).⁷⁶ In practice, however, they too seemed to be mainly interested in recruiting useful future citizens, rather than in alleviating their plight. Massey informed Devonshire that Canada was particularly interested in farm labourers and glassworkers.⁷⁷ Crerar, the Canadian minister responsible for immigration was likewise interested in the glassworkers provided they could obtain sufficient capital to establish themselves.⁷⁸ On learning that others were also expressing an interest in the glassworkers, Pearson of the High Commissioner's office in London wrote to Skelton urging that Ottawa move quickly to secure their services, as 'there does seem to be a chance here of not only helping the refugees, but helping ourselves in the process.'⁷⁹ The latter point appears to be the key one, as there is no suggestion of any urgent need for action in connection with the other Sudeten German refugees.⁸⁰ While it transpired that only about fifty-three of the refugees were experienced glassworkers, a meeting with the Sudeten German leaders in Ottawa indicated that the other refugees included, as Blair advised Skelton, 'highly skilled craftsmen in industries that are practically unknown in this country.'⁸¹

The dominions were not only interested in acquiring valuable new citizens with as little cost to themselves as possible, they were also anxious to square the circle by being seen to contribute to the solution of the international refugee problem, while simultaneously not appearing to be 'soft' on large-scale immigration lest this antagonise their electorates. As previously seen, even South Africa had been embarrassed into attending Evian, even if only in an 'observer' capacity. When confronted with the issue in a letter from a member of the public, Walter Nash replied agreeing that New Zealand should 'make a contribution at least as great, relatively to its capacity, as any other country' in absorbing refugees, while hedging this responsibility with qualifications in regard to housing, employment and 'other practical considerations.'⁸² In an exchange with the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Ireland, Lyons was also keen to pass Australia's actions off as playing 'her part amongst the nations of the world, in absorbing her reasonable quota of these people' without actually doing anything which in practice might jeopardise her domestic harmony, such as admitting those who might compete with Australian labour, reduce the capacity of the country to absorb those of

⁷⁶ King, *Diary*, 129/1032, Entry 21 December 1939.

⁷⁷ LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/3/Massey to Devonshire, 1 December 1939.

⁷⁸ *Idem*.

⁷⁹ LAC, RG25/Vol. 1871/Evian/327/2/Pearson to Skelton, 4 November 1938, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Idem*.

⁸¹ LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/2/Massey to Mackenzie King, 11 November 1938; LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/3/Blair to Skelton, 14 December 1939.

⁸² NANZ, Nash/1311/Nash, W, to Belshaw, Dr. H., 27 March 1939.

British descent who might wish to migrate, or prove 'undesirable.'⁸³ Meanwhile, the Canadian Department of External Affairs commissioned a report on what other countries were doing about the refugee problem (largely culled from press sources), suggesting that it wished to have a context in which to consider Canadian actions, presumably with a view as to how these would appear, both to international opinion as well as to the electorate.⁸⁴ Yet, as Mackenzie King told Skelton, cabinet took the view that the public was likely to be strongly opposed to any large, sudden influx of people who might find difficulty in assimilating socially and economically, although there was some, but far from unanimous, support for doing something for the Sudeten refugees and 'we have to keep our own position in mind.'⁸⁵

The various schemes advanced to resolve the issue therefore had to be capable of satisfying these inherently irreconcilable criteria and, unsurprisingly, proved largely disappointing in application. In New Zealand, Walter Nash arranged for the Secretary of the Labour Party to organise the reception of the 207 Sudeten German Democrat builders that the government had agreed to accept. His letter was dated 27 March 1939, however, and he was unable to provide any more definite information, suggesting that it may have been superseded by events.⁸⁶ However, he assured Wilson that Jordan would write when 'any party of Sudeten Germans leave England for New Zealand.'⁸⁷ There is no indication that any ever did so. The final absurdity was the cabinet decision on the 16 of May 1939 to advise Sir Herbert Emerson, the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, that it had 'no observations' to offer the (by then non-existent) Government of Czechoslovakia on the refugee problem.⁸⁸ Lyons informed Duncan that Australia could perhaps take 500 refugees over the next twelve months, depending on the capacity of the voluntary organisations then being set up to look after their welfare on arrival.⁸⁹ This was later changed to a figure of 15,000 refugees from all sources (which would of course include the Sudeten Germans) over a period of three years, as Lyons advised the St. Vincent de Paul Society.⁹⁰ The Prime Minister further emphasised to the Acting High Commissioner that such refugees could only be accepted to the extent that they could be absorbed in trades or occupations without

⁸³ NAA, A981/4/Ref/1/Transcript forwarded by Lyons to St. Vincent de Paul Society, Dublin, 12 December 1939.

⁸⁴ LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/3/Skelton to Blair, 9 December 1939., p. 3.

⁸⁵ LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/3/File note by Skelton, 1 December 1939; Mackenzie King, W. L., as cited in LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/3/File note by Skelton, 9 December 1939.

⁸⁶ NANZ Nash/1311/Nash to Wilson 27 March 1939.

⁸⁷ *Idem.*

⁸⁸ NANZ, Nash/2014/Cabinet Submission, 16 May 1939.

⁸⁹ NAA, A981/4/Ref/8/Lyons to Duncan, 22 December 1939.

⁹⁰ NAA, A981/4/Ref/1/Transcript forwarded by Lyons to St. Vincent de Paul Society, Dublin, 12 December 1939.

detriment to Australian workers and that each must make a normal application to migrate.⁹¹ The High Commission's request to process applications in London was rejected, but it was conceded that applications could be forwarded by airmail to Canberra rather than surface mail. It was further conceded that the 'Sudeten Aryan German Democrats' should clearly label their applications as such, but there is no indication that any record was kept of their relative success in obtaining permission to migrate. The only proposal for a large-scale settlement on file, for a colony of Sudeten Germans outside Perth, appears to have fallen foul of a combination of government ideological opposition to group settlements and apathy on the part of the state government involved.⁹² Canada originally envisaged transplanting the glass and porcelain worker refugees as 'highly skilled manufacturing units' to develop these infant industries in their new homeland, as Blair explained to Skelton in December 1938.⁹³ This proposal appears to have been abandoned by the end of the month, however, presumably because even with the availability of financial capital, the absence of physical capital rendered the scheme impractical, and the authorities appear to have proceeded thereafter on the basis that all the refugees would be settled on the land.⁹⁴ Although it was never intended the agricultural settlers should arrive before spring due to the requirements of the agricultural cycle, quibbling about finance lasted for most of the winter and it was not until this was resolved that arrangements for examining the applicants (which also took a substantial amount of time) came into consideration, so that the first group was not ready to sail until 8 April, by which time Hitler was already in Prague.⁹⁵ The question of enquiring about the half of "their" refugees who had remained in Czechoslovakia was raised internally, but there is no indication that any such approach was made, which makes it very unlikely any of them ever made it to Canada.⁹⁶ The remainder were settled in two colonies which seem to have eventually prospered after some initial difficulties.⁹⁷

Despite the rhetoric, overall the dominions cannot be said to have covered themselves in glory when it came to recognising and discharging obligations in respect of the Czechs. In spite of appearances the British guarantee did involve them, but it had been made over their

⁹¹ NAA, A981/4/Ref/8/Lyons to Duncan, 22 December 1939.

⁹² NAA, A981/4/Ref/1/Menzies to Premier, Western Australia, 21 July 1939.

⁹³ LAC, RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/3/Blair to Skelton, 9 December 1939., p. 3

⁹⁴ LAC, EA/RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/3/Mackenzie King to Massey, 12 December 1939; LAC, EA/RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/3/Blair to Skelton, 31 December 1939.

⁹⁵ LAC, EA/RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/3/Mackenzie King to Massey, 12 December 1939; LAC, EA/RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/4/ Massey to Mackenzie King, 2 February 1939; LAC, EA/RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/4/Blair to Skelton, 4 February 1939; LAC, EA/RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/5/Massey to Mackenzie King, 26 April 1939.

⁹⁶ LAC, EA/RG25/Vol.1871/Evian/327/5/Memorandum for Prime Minister, 18 March 1939.

⁹⁷ LAC, EA/RG25/D1/Vol.779/382/Memorandum for Prime Minister, 15 May 1941.

heads, and even if the unenthusiastic dominion representatives in London did not enjoy the full confidence of their masters back home, there is no evidence of any overwhelming enthusiasm for the arrangement there either. They may not have been in a position to finance the Czechs themselves, but they made no effort to enquire whether they could provide anything by way of assistance. Their treatment of the refugees was shabby, involving self-interested attempts to cherry-pick immigrants who would be of practical use to their dominion, while seeking to avoid any obligation in respect of the rest. The eventual delays in this process appear to have resulted in about half of the refugees falling into Hitler's hands with the march into Prague. The cynical interpretation of Mackenzie King's words, that when he called for the Czechs to be dealt with chivalrously and generously by other nations, he meant nations other than his own, could easily be extended to the other dominions as well.

The dominions' sense of security after Munich

It might therefore first appear that the Munich Agreement meant a reversion to business as usual as far as the dominions were concerned. This was actually far from being the case. In New Zealand, Berendsen acknowledged in a 14 October 1938 memorandum for the government that their 'Moral Foreign Policy' was dead in the water, and, while circumstances might develop that would allow its eventual resurrection, for the moment they would have to bring their foreign policy more into line with that of Britain, despite their dislike of Munich.⁹⁸ Their Organisation for National Security, galvanised by the crisis, continued its preparations apace. Indeed its secretary, Colonel Stevens, wrote to General Ismay in London that he had long maintained 'that the only thing that would really produce results in National Defence in New Zealand would be a war scare - and now we have had our scare and duly produced our results.'⁹⁹ Among other things that had been achieved, a War Book had been drafted and was then under revision; direct liaison with Australia had been initiated between Stevens and Shedden, the permanent head of the Australian Department of Defence, (with the blessing of their respective governments) continuing to work on the best method of accomplishing this; and a National Supply Committee had been established.¹⁰⁰ The Chiefs of Staff also saw fit to prepare an up-to-date report on threats to New Zealand's

⁹⁸ NANZ, EA/1/85.1.1pt1-DefoNZGen/85/1/1 part 1/Memo by Berendsen dated 14 October 1938.

⁹⁹ NANZ, EA/1/156.6.1/Defence Committee/Imperial Defence/General/Stevens to Ismay 11 November 1938.

¹⁰⁰ NAA, A981/PAC/1/Savage to Lyons, 23 September 1938; NZNA/EA/1/156.6.1/Defence Committee/Imperial Defence/General/Stevens to Ismay 11 November 1938

interests citing 'disturbing,' but unspecified, evidence that Germany had planned to embark on a commerce raiding campaign in the Pacific, and noting 'the increasingly threatening aspect of international affairs.'¹⁰¹ The continuing nature of these preparations, and Stevens's implication that they were at long last receiving their due attention (in the form of a full-time assistant for himself and part-time assistance from the various departments of state), indicate that defence remained a priority, even though the immediate crisis had been peacefully resolved, and the Savage government scarcely lacked alternative concerns.¹⁰²

Savage had previously mooted the idea of a conference to discuss the strategic significance of the Pacific islands, but this had foundered on British and Australian inertia.¹⁰³ Lyons now undertook in a letter to Savage to take this up 'at once' with the Minister for Defence and to respond 'as soon as practicable.'¹⁰⁴ The Australians, however, do not appear to have regarded this as of particular importance, at least pending the British response, and no further action is recorded in the file beyond a note that the memorandum had been copied to the Department of Defence.¹⁰⁵ It is of course true that nothing concrete could have been done about the conference itself until the British view was obtained, but a brief outline of Australia's position with regard to the Pacific islands would undoubtedly have been helpful, as well as courteous (particularly as New Zealand had already provided Canberra with an outline of Wellington's concerns).¹⁰⁶ The lack of any further such response can therefore be taken as an indication of the low importance Canberra attached to the question at this stage.

Even if unprepared to reach out across the Tasman at this point, Canberra was at least prepared to reach out to its own state governments. Page (as acting Prime Minister, in Lyons's absence) summoned a meeting of the Loans Council, which consisted of members of the Commonwealth (federal) and state governments, in order to try to co-ordinate defensive measures.¹⁰⁷ Menzies appears to have expected Lyons to take no part in this and to have been most disconcerted to discover that the Prime Minister intended to lead the central government delegation at the conference.¹⁰⁸ Lyons's attendance implies that he had

¹⁰¹ NZNA/Nash/1262/War Prep/Rept. Of the Chiefs of Staff, 31 October 1938, p. 1

¹⁰² NZNA/EA/1/156.6.1/Defence Committee/Imperial Defence/General/Stevens to Ismay 11 November 1938; for Wellington's alternative concerns, see previous chapter.

¹⁰³ NAA, A981/PAC/1/Copy Memorandum from Savage to Governor-General, New Zealand, 17 May 1938

¹⁰⁴ NAA, A981/PAC/1/Lyons to Savage, undated

¹⁰⁵ NAA, A981/PAC/1/File note by D. Strahan, 3/6/38

¹⁰⁶ NAA, A981/PAC/1/Copy Memorandum from Savage to Governor-General, New Zealand, 17 May 1938

¹⁰⁷ Page, *Truant Surgeon*, p. 262.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

determined that it was important to take steps, or at least to be seen to take steps, on the defence question, however out of sympathy he might personally be with the measures to be undertaken.

The conference minutes are even more revealing in regard to the elite's thinking in the wake of Munich.¹⁰⁹ Lyons stated that 'the sobering experiences of September have bitten deeply into Australian life, and there is an insistent call that Australia shall leave no stone unturned in respect of national security.'¹¹⁰ No doubt this was mostly a tactical ploy designed to make it more difficult for the states to reject Canberra's proposals, but, it is still evidence of how the government were thinking at the time. There would be no point in such a tactic unless the government felt that the states were susceptible to such an approach.

Canberra's proposals were likewise justified in terms of their contribution to defence. Firstly, Lyons acknowledged Canberra's sole responsibility for all matters of a purely defensive nature, and continued 'we propose to accelerate our defence programme, the details of which we shall announce at an early date, but that need not concern us here.' He then went on to consider expenditure which contained both civil and defence aspects, expressing the hope that the states would be prepared to divert their loan-funded public works programmes into these areas and therefore away from projects which had no defensive value. To this end, he proposed the establishment of a committee of Commonwealth (national) and state experts to prioritise the various projects proposed by Canberra and the states in terms of their defensive value for the consideration of the Loan Council at a subsequent meeting. This drawn out approach suggests that, although the government considered further defensive measures important in the wake of Munich, it did not as yet regard them as urgent (or at least was unsure of its ability to convince the states that they were urgent). Arguing that the country's population, development and wealth were integral to planning the successful defence of the country, the Prime Minister further advised that an advisory committee, comprising representatives of the central government, the states and industry, be established to consider all the issues involved, including 'the vulnerability of industry.'

Lyons's reference to 'the insistent call' for improved national security worked, but only to the limited extent that it forced the states to pay lip-service to it. Stevens of New South

¹⁰⁹ NAA, A9504/1/4/Premiers' Conferences: 1933 - '46/Proceedings, 21 October 1938

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Wales assured Lyons that the states would 'not shirk that obligation.'¹¹¹ Dunstan of Victoria acknowledged 'the importance of national security and the Government of Victoria is prepared to co-operate with the Commonwealth Government in any national plan designed to improve Australia's defences.' Forgan-Smith of Queensland considered that it was 'a request that no good citizen of the Commonwealth would respond to in the negative.'¹¹² Troy for Western Australia thought that his government would 'co-operate on the committee which has been suggested. Indeed I cannot see how it could do otherwise, since the matters to be dealt with will be of such great importance to Australia.'¹¹³ Ogilvie for Tasmania appreciated 'the necessity for the co-ordination of Commonwealth and state activities in respect of national defence and development.'¹¹⁴ Even Butler of South Australia, who appeared somewhat sceptical about the necessity for increased defence expenditure (having castigated its wastefulness and expressed the hope that appeasement would succeed so that 'this huge expenditure may be avoided in the future'), was prepared to 'accept your statement that the expenditure proposed by your government is necessary.'¹¹⁵

Lip-service having duly being paid at the shrine of national security, the states proceeded to raise their objections to Canberra's proposals. These were threefold: employment, sensitivity about existing projects, and sovereignty. Dunstan of Victoria noted 'the need to absorb the greatest possible number of unemployed persons' and pointed out that Canberra's projects were unlikely to satisfy that requirement as they would require skilled workers whereas most of the unemployed were unskilled.¹¹⁶ Spooner for New South Wales likewise expressed concern over who would look after unskilled workers if his government agreed to reallocate funds to a project which would not require them.¹¹⁷ Troy made the absorption into the new projects of those employed on existing state projects a condition of Western Australia's co-operation.¹¹⁸ The states also disliked the implication that the works currently being undertaken had no defensive value, indicating that they too considered the issue of national security to be one of the utmost sensitivity at this juncture. Forgan-Smith, backed by Dunstan, argued that the current projects did have a defensive value as they were contributing to the development of the country and demanded that the wording of the resolution be changed to avoid any imputation that this was not the case. The states were

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

equally concerned about their sovereignty. Butler and Troy were insistent the committee should not prioritise proposed projects on their defensive value, but that the Loan Council itself should determine the order in which they be executed. Forgan-Smith likewise declared he could not accept the idea that the states should hand over authority over their public works projects to the Department of Defence, while continuing to finance such undertakings out of their own funds, and complained of Canberra's centralising tendencies over finance.¹¹⁹ He raised the example of a case where a state might decline to substitute one project for another on employment grounds, and voiced the concern that this could instantly be used against them to indicate that they were refusing to co-operate with Canberra on defence matters, in spite of having just agreed to do so.¹²⁰ The states were therefore clearly more concerned with public opinion than security. They wished to depict themselves as co-operating with Canberra on defence, while actually preserving their distance and continuing to prioritise employment. Their resistance to moving towards defence related projects, coupled with their desire to avoid being perceived as resistant, suggests they saw the post-Munich international situation as continuing to be of concern to their voters, without actually providing a real, imminent threat requiring a decisive response.

Each of the state delegations also brought their own agenda to the discussion. Stevens of New South Wales appeared to be making a bid to establish his credentials as a potential successor to Lyons: demonstrating the steps his state had already taken, speaking wherever possible on behalf of all the states, and not just his own; and taking the opportunity to muscle in on Canberra's territory by advancing an expansionist economic policy.¹²¹ Meanwhile, Victoria pointed out that it was working with a reduced allocation of loan funds, and that it was faced with increased responsibilities because of the drought affecting that state, which would impact on its ability to reallocate resources in the direction of projects with a defensive aspect to them.¹²² Queensland observed 'its essential vulnerability' to attack, mandated an interest in defence, and argued that its northern inhabitants were as entitled to protection as 'the more favoured parts of Australia.'¹²³ South Australia (in a clear bid to induce industrial investment in its territory), noted that it was said to be secure from assault, complained that voters in the non-industrial states had not profited from the location of industries in exposed places (by inference, in the industrial states), and that the former were

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12; *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

unhappy at now being required to contribute more in taxes to defend the latter from attack.¹²⁴ Western Australia (having previously tried to secede in 1933) feared its interests would be subordinated to those of the larger states, citing its previous experience on the Loan Council as precedent.¹²⁵ Tasmania, represented by its Minister for Education, made a bid for increased funding for technical education, 'which is vital from every point of view, including that of defence.'¹²⁶ This fractious promotion of their own interests indicates the state delegations saw no need to cooperate in the national interest at this time, which again suggests they did not yet take the external threat very seriously, except as a public relations issue.

The conference eventually accepted a watered-down resolution on the first proposal that the states would divert expenditure into defence-related projects. Crucially the states had rejected the suggestion that the proposed committee of experts should prioritise potential projects on their defensive value and no mention of this was made in the resolution. By doing this, they were certainly reserving to themselves the right to decide how their loan funds should be spent, but, by implication, they were denying themselves expert insight into the relative defensive merits of each project, which was likely to reduce the quality of decisions made from a purely defence perspective. Quite evidently, the states did not consider themselves to be in any imminent danger, or they would have reacted differently. If, nevertheless, the governments were at least able to agree a diluted resolution on the defence proposal, the same could not be said of the one concerned with development. As with defence, the states vigorously objected to an advisory committee that would prioritise proposed projects. In this case, however, Canberra proved unwilling to accommodate their objection, and the matter was held over to the next meeting of the Loan Council.¹²⁷

The conference therefore indicates that national security was a sensitive issue for the political elite in Australia in the wake of Munich, but not a serious or urgent one. Canberra's proposals indicate a belief that something needed to be done, or seen to be done, but the proposed timescale suggests that these steps were not designed to counter an imminent threat of any magnitude. Likewise the states did not wish to be seen to be uncooperative with the central government, which indicates that they also felt the issue to be electorally significant, but their objections over employment and sovereignty indicate where their priorities lay (and

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

where they presumed those of their voters lay, too). This suggests they equally did not regard the country's plight as pressing at this point.

Yet, as Lyons had mentioned in his opening speech at the conference, Canberra also intended to take more direct action with regard to defence. Defence had first been discussed at Cabinet in the context of the crisis on the 13 September. The minutes suggest there had been a certain level of urgency to the discussion as it was decided that Thorby, the Minister of Defence, 'should confer with the Defence Committee with a view to expediting works and organisation in case of emergency.'¹²⁸ Further discussions on the specifics of air defences appear in the minutes on the 19th, on Nauru (a former German colony, held under a League of Nations mandate in co-trusteeship with Britain and New Zealand, and important for its phosphate deposits, but largely indefensible because of its size and proximity to Japanese holdings) where the matter was referred to the Departments of Defence and External Affairs on the 27th, and on Home Defence arrangements on the 28th.¹²⁹ With the crisis over and in Lyons's absence, Cabinet also agreed the acquisition of a squadron of seaplanes for 'northern waters' was desirable at its meeting on 5 October.¹³⁰ On the 13th, Thorby publicly announced that, in addition to increases advised in April, the present strength of the militia would be roughly doubled, and that a report on the state of the armed forces would be produced for Cabinet by the end of the year.¹³¹ He did not mention that on the 11th Cabinet had debated the thorny question of conscription, but that a decision had been deferred while he sought further information from the Military Board.¹³² Conscription was contentious for two reasons: it left the government open to demands that capital should be conscripted as well as men, a step which the financially orthodox Lyons Government was most unlikely to welcome; and, as with Joe Savage in New Zealand, it ran contrary to the Prime Minister's own deeply-rooted anti-war sentiments. Nonetheless, the Cabinet, albeit in Lyons's absence, clearly continued to view defence as a significant issue, even though the immediate crisis had passed.

In South Africa, defence also remained a concern. The defences of Simonstown naval base (a British base whose landward security was a South African responsibility) were to be

¹²⁸ NAA, A2694/Vol. 18/Part 5/Minutes, 13 September 1938.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19, 27, & 28 September 1938.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5 October 1938.

¹³¹ *The Argus*, (Melbourne) 13 October 1938, p. 3.

¹³² NAA, A2694/Vol. 18/Part 5/Minutes, 11 October 1938.

upgraded, and coastal defences generally improved.¹³³ The government had previously decided to send Pirow to London to discuss defence matters, and organisation for this continued unabated, in spite of Munich.¹³⁴ Pirow brought with him two experts from the Department of Defence, who remained in London to complete their task after he had departed for the Continent.¹³⁵ Agreement was subsequently reached for the acquisition of additional military materials, some of which would be supplied by Britain and some of which would be produced by the South Africans themselves under licence.¹³⁶ All this did, nevertheless, presume an ongoing requirement for additional armaments. This contrasted sharply with the government's public stance that Munich had guaranteed peace for many years to come, for instance, as depicted by Hertzog in an appeal to voters for a by-election his government was facing.¹³⁷ Given the sensitivity of the question of war for the United Party, it is scarcely surprising they took every opportunity to play down the likelihood of its occurrence. Still, it might be thought that, with the Neutrality Pact in his pocket, Hertzog could have afforded to let defence slide a little. Part of the reason he did not was undoubtedly because he wished to hold as strong a hand as possible over any negotiations that might develop on the colonial question generally, and on South West Africa in particular. As will be seen, though, negotiations over this were envisaged as taking place within a Commonwealth context (where the crucial question would be British, not South African strength), and only becoming direct between Germany and South Africa if British negotiators failed to deliver the desired result. Even in the latter case, South Africa would be entirely dependent on British backing, as, lacking a navy of its own, it would be completely reliant on the Royal Navy to counterbalance the *Kriegsmarine*.¹³⁸ It therefore seems likely the government had other motives for its defence measures. Te Water was certainly pessimistic about the outlook, warning that even these steps might prove insufficient under current international conditions.¹³⁹ The continued emphasis on defence therefore suggests that Hertzog was less sanguine than he appeared about the prospects of an outbreak of war in Europe.

¹³³ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/C. Te Water to J. B. M. Hertzog, 22 November 1938.

¹³⁴ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14/Correspondence/O. Pirow to C. Te Water 10 August 1938; NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol. 24/ D. C. Burnside to J. B. M. Hertzog, 4 November 1938; & NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14/Correspondence/J. B. M. Hertzog to N. Chamberlain 10 October 1938.

¹³⁵ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78)//13/Correspondence/C. Te Water to J. B. M. Hertzog, 22 November 1938.

¹³⁶ *Idem*.

¹³⁷ NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32)/Vol. 112/ J. B. M. Hertzog as cited in *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 October 1938.

¹³⁸ See Chapter One, above.

¹³⁹ *Idem*.

Of all the dominions, only Canada appeared to be convinced of Munich's transformative powers. When the French Consul and his wife expressed concerns that Germany, having scented weakness, might return with greater demands, Mackenzie King dismissed these fears, recording his response in his diary, that 'as the inwardness of the situation had been so completely disclosed that anything of this kind was not probable. That the crisis had passed and a new order of things would begin to come into being.'¹⁴⁰ This somewhat opaque statement suggests he believed that, through face-to-face contact, Munich had allowed the great powers to develop such a mutual understanding that future issues would be resolved without having to resort to confrontation. Indeed, he later recorded on 7 October that 'had the British government intervened at the time I did, with Hitler, they might have settled the question of Austria and Czechoslovakia without any relation to force.'¹⁴¹ Mackenzie King continued that there was therefore no need to go on with strengthening the country's defences, and so, Canada, alone of all the dominions, sought to backtrack on the military provisions it had made, reversing a decision to order additional planes from the U. S. A. under warrant from the Governor-General. Of his colleagues, only Lapointe had sufficient influence to change the Prime Minister's mind, but the former was just as glad of appeasement's apparent triumph and just as willing to believe in its efficacy, as the Prime Minister noted in his diary for 4 October.¹⁴² The rest appeared ready to acquiesce in what these two agreed on the subject. As previously seen, when Power, the Quebecker Minister of Pensions and National Health, had advised Mackenzie King to proceed with a pro-British broadcast during the September crisis, neither he nor his colleagues complained when the Prime Minister reversed this decision after Lapointe urged him to, for fear of how it would play in his province, despite Lapointe being in Geneva, and Power just back from Quebec.¹⁴³

The Colonial Question

Defence was not the only issue which confronted the dominions after Munich. The colonial question, which had been discussed at the 1937 Imperial Conference and been the subject of communication between Germany and Britain (on its own and South Africa's behalf) prior to

¹⁴⁰ King, *Diary*, 30 September 1938

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 7 October 1938

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 4 October 1938

¹⁴³ See Chapter One, above.

the *Anschluss*, was reopened in a 10 October letter from General Hertzog to Chamberlain.¹⁴⁴ The origins of its revival seem to lie in a rather over-literal (given how reliable the statement itself proved to be) interpretation of Hitler's remark in his *Sportpalast* speech of 26 September that he had 'no further territorial demands to make of Europe', and that therefore his next move might be an attempt to regain Germany's former colonies.¹⁴⁵ Canada was not concerned in this as it held no mandates over former German colonies. Theoretically New Zealand were prepared to consider a discussion of the return of Western Samoa, but only as part of a general settlement, and only subject to terms and conditions which would guarantee the welfare of the natives as they had made clear at the Imperial Conference in 1937.¹⁴⁶ It was reported in a paper prepared for the Pacific Defence Conference held in April 1939 that the native population was strongly resistant to the idea of being returned to German rule.¹⁴⁷ This paper also cautioned that the territory might be converted into a base of operations which could subsequently be used against New Zealand trade in time of war so 'any transfer from New Zealand control should therefore be strongly resisted.'¹⁴⁸ Given the racial attitudes of the Nazis (even pre-*Kristallnacht*), the reservations New Zealand had about the Nazi regime, and the apparent opposition of the natives to a restoration of German rule, the triumvirate were effectively maintaining a veto over the return of their mandate, without in any way appearing to be obstructive.¹⁴⁹

Never one to shy away from being, let alone appearing, obstructive, Billy Hughes reiterated for Australia in a radio broadcast that New Guinea was not for return, citing a number of reasons in support of this stance.¹⁵⁰ Firstly he argued that the mandate was a trust, and that therefore any surrender of it would be dishonourable. This may have been a less than subtle dig at London, and it certainly seemed designed to make it more difficult for either London or Canberra to backslide on the issue. Unlike other occasions when his bellicosity earned

¹⁴⁴ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/ J. B. M. Hertzog to C. Te Water 2 February 1938; NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.43/Correspondence /J. B. M. Hertzog to N. Chamberlain, 10 October 1938.

¹⁴⁵ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-1945: Nemesis*, (London, 2001), p. 117

¹⁴⁶ M. J. Savage, as cited in *Imperial Conference*, 1937, Vol. 38, 11th Meeting, pp. 10 – 13, as cited in J. D. O' Shea, 'New Zealand's Attitude to and Relations with Germany to October 1938' in *New Zealand War Histories: Pre-War Foreign Policy*, (War History Branch, Dept. Of Internal Affairs, unpublished manuscript, November 1947, NZNL, MS/MSY-5965), p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ TNA, DO/126/5/ Pacific Defence Conference/Memoranda/Possible Effect of German Demand for the Return of Mandated Territories, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ See, for instance, NLNZ, *Bassett Papers*/2000-094-02/interview of Sir Alister McIntosh by Professor John Roberts 20/3/78 (subsequently edited by McIntosh), pp. 4 – 5; J. D. O' Shea, 'Attitude to Germany' *War Histories*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ Hughes, W. M., as cited in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 October 1938, p. 11.

him a rebuke, this assertiveness seems to have provoked no adverse reaction from his colleagues, particularly Lyons (who must have come to regret that unlike other dominion Prime Ministers, he had not made External Affairs his own). Probably they agreed with Hughes's next point that having 'a hostile power' so close 'would be a pistol aimed at the heart of Australia.' Hughes's choice of words was also significant: Hertzog, for instance, would never have implied that Germany could be seen as hostile, despite Pretoria's equal determination that neither South West Africa nor Tanganyika (which was not even a South African mandate) should be returned. Te Water, apparently relying on his ideological belief in racial solidarity, even thought that Germany's return would help counter Japan.¹⁵¹ Canberra certainly does not appear to have shared these views, or at least no public steps were taken to soften or dilute Hughes's message. The latter did not draw attention to it, but Germany and Japan's actual burgeoning friendship, rather than potential rivalry, probably weighed more with the Australians. A German New Guinea, backed by Japan, would have been much more dangerous than its isolated condition had permitted it to be during the First World War. It would also, in its turn, have enabled Japanese operations even further south than were currently possible, rendering such a return still less in Australian interests. Additionally, in his broadcast Hughes contrasted the benefits of Australian rule for the natives with the previous regime in his broadcast, noting that their population, which had been in decline, was now increasing.¹⁵² It is not particularly clear how this could have been known with any certainty, given the lack of European penetration of the interior at the time. However if self-respect, security and philanthropy were not enough, Hughes went on to draw attention to the territory's rich mineral resources, of which only gold had so far been developed. He carefully juxtaposed this with the losses in men, materials and currency which Australia had incurred during the war, noting that for this she had even been 'denied such poor recompense as was provided by reparations.' He rhetorically demanded whether Australia did not therefore have a right to 'peace and security', and vowed that she would do everything in her powers to assert this right. It was clearly an impressive performance. He had made it quite evident Australia would only surrender New Guinea if forced to do so, and, by going public, had made clear that any surrender would have come about only as the result of pressure applied from outside. Such pressure could only be applied if Britain either stood by or applied it herself, and the uncompromising tone of Hughes's stance indicated that any such betrayal would poison relations for years to come. Interestingly, this suggests

¹⁵¹ NASA, SAB/BTS/1/4/4/Memorandum of Meeting between C. Te Water & Count van Limburg Stirum, 28 October 1938.

¹⁵² Hughes, W. M., as cited in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 October 1938, p. 11.

he did not altogether trust the British at this time, and that his colleagues either shared his mistrust or were at the least prepared to let him run with it.

Tensions between the Union and German communities in South West Africa also seemed to take on a new significance in light of the Sudeten issue, and Hertzog, as noted above, reopened the idea of a negotiated solution of the colonial question with the British in a personal letter to Neville Chamberlain on the 10 October 1938.¹⁵³ Under the impression that the latter intended to call a conference to resolve all outstanding international tensions, he advised the British Prime Minister that the South African Government was still prepared to offer Germany financial compensation in return for a permanent renunciation of any interest in South West Africa.¹⁵⁴ There was, of course, no mention of returning South West Africa. He had previously indicated in a letter to Te Water on 2 March 1938, that South Africa recognised no German claims on the territory, except those arising out of being a party to the agreement which had established the system of mandates.¹⁵⁵ This legalistic pedantry seems rather uncharacteristic for Hertzog, and can most likely be laid at "Body's" door, probably galvanised by the fear that if they did not acknowledge Germany's precise rights, this would somehow undermine the Union's own case. The Hertzog government had no intention of surrendering South Africa's mandate, they simply wished to make the German problem go away, and were in the fortunate position of being able (and prepared) to pay them to do so. In his letter to Chamberlain, the General also restated his preference that negotiations should take place in association with the British and should form part of a general settlement of the colonial question in the same letter. It is not hard to see why. South Africa on its own, lacking any semblance of a navy (as previously seen), was scarcely in a strong bargaining position. It was much better to allow the British to negotiate on its behalf, and, if it was done as part of a general settlement, this would wipe away all the festering grievances which had been racheting up international tension in one fell swoop. This would have the happy consequence of reducing to insignificance one of the major fault-lines dividing the *Afrikaner* and English wings of the United Party, thereby denying the Opposition one of its favourite avenues of attack.¹⁵⁶ Therefore it can only have come as something of a disappointment to Hertzog when Chamberlain indicated such an initiative would have to wait for a more

¹⁵³ NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.143/*Cape Argus* 14 September 1938, *Cape Times* and *Rand Daily Mail*, both 16 September 1938; NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.43/Correspondence/J. B. M. Hertzog to N. Chamberlain, 10 October 1938.

¹⁵⁴ *Idem*.

¹⁵⁵ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78)/13/Correspondence/J. B. M. Hertzog to C. Te Water, 2 March 1938.

¹⁵⁶ Both wings wished to assert their identity: English South Africans by offering Britain their unconditional support in times of difficulty, and *Afrikaners* by maintaining their distance.

opportune moment and that they must instead work towards creating the necessary favourable conditions for the proposal to succeed.¹⁵⁷

Hertzog viewed the stability of South West Africa as an important concern, however, and had already discussed with Te Water the idea of bilateral negotiations with the Germans if his preferred option of using the British did not deliver the desired results in his 2 March 1938 letter.¹⁵⁸ Pirow's visit to Europe provided an opportunity to use a trusted confidante to open negotiations. The General had already referred to Pirow's visit in connection with the colonial question in his letter to Chamberlain of 10 October: 'Minister Pirow is going to the United Kingdom one of these days. He is fully conversant with our views and, should you wish to see him, he will probably be in a position to give you any information you may require.'¹⁵⁹ This trip expanded to encompass Berlin, Brussels, Burgos, Lisbon and Rome as well as his original destination of London.¹⁶⁰ Te Water now indicated to Gie in a letter of 19 October 1938, that Pirow's 'talks here will be on somewhat wider lines than you have read about',¹⁶¹ The exact 'width' of these lines has been the subject of much conjecture, then and since. Press speculation was so rife that the Belgian and Portuguese governments felt compelled officially to deny that they were prepared to surrender, in return for financial compensation, any of their colonial territories in place of the mandated territories.¹⁶² Pirow himself steadfastly denied any such intentions, but it is difficult to see what other reason he had, as his own explanations do not quite ring true. There is, for example, nothing to support his contention that the sole purpose of his political mission to Germany was to bring about an Anglo-German rapprochement. It therefore seems most likely the political aspect of his German visit had its origins in the colonial question, and it does not seem plausible that Pirow would have undertaken this without the belief that he could bring something new to the table. This in turn suggests he did indeed expect the Belgians and Portuguese to compensate Germany by giving up their colonies in Africa, and was roundly disillusioned of this presumption by Lisbon and Brussels. There is, however, no reason to believe

¹⁵⁷ NASA, *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.43/Correspondence/ N. Chamberlain to J. B. M. Hertzog, 25 October 1938.

¹⁵⁸ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/J. B. M. Hertzog to C. Te Water, 2 March 1938.

¹⁵⁹ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14/Correspondence/J. B. M. Hertzog to N. Chamberlain, 1 February 1938.

¹⁶⁰ O. Pirow, as cited in TNA, FO/372/3314/Dominions Intelligence/Mr. Pirow's European visit/Sir William Clark to Sir Thomas Inskip, 23 February, 1938, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶¹ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14/Correspondence/C. Te Water to Dr. F. S. N. Gie, 19 October 1938.

¹⁶² NASA, *Hertzog Papers*(A32), Vol.144/*Daily Mail*, 5 November 1938 & *Daily Star*, 3 November 1938.

MacDonald's impression (as communicated to Stirling, who in turn passed it on to Canberra) that Pirow had offered to hand over South West Africa.¹⁶³ It is possible Hitler might not have accepted such an offer had it been made, as it would have provided something of a hostage to fortune, but, Pirow would then have known Hitler was not interested in the territory. While he would still have failed to deliver a headline grabbing deal, he would, however, have been in a position to tell Hertzog that they need no longer concern themselves with the matter, which would have been a significant consolation prize.

Overview

As evidenced by Pirow's brazen actions, shame played no part in the dominions' actions. This did not mean, however, that they simply subscribed to 'the spirit of Munich.' Their behaviour in the aftermath of the settlement was almost entirely driven by pragmatic considerations. Only New Zealand tried to distance itself from the agreement, the rest enthusiastically endorsed it, in public and in private. They were all only prepared to assist those disadvantaged by the settlement either to the extent that it was in their own interests to do so, or they were unable to prevent themselves from being drawn into doing so. The cynical interpretation of Mackenzie King's words, that when he called for the Czechs to be dealt with chivalrously and generously by other nations, he meant nations other than his own, could easily be extended to the other dominions as well. The 'spirit of Munich' only seemed to apply to the need for others to make sacrifices. Certainly, the renewal of the colonial question revealed all three mandate-holding dominions to be unwilling to make territorial concessions on their own behalf, in the interests of appeasing a troubled world. Only Canada seemed to be under the impression that a new era of peace had been inaugurated, and the rest resolved to press ahead with steps to strengthen their defences. Australia might not have recognised a pressing need to co-ordinate its activities internally or across the Tasman, but it did press ahead with a doubling of its militia, in spite of straitened financial conditions. New Zealand likewise faced serious financial constraints, but nonetheless continued to invest in defence, even though the crisis had passed. Although South Africa was sufficiently wealthy to be largely immune to such concerns, defence was politically contentious there, but the government continued to invest in this area, albeit discreetly. All three therefore clearly did not accept that Munich had fundamentally transformed international conditions for the better. With the exception of the Canadian

¹⁶³ MacDonald, Malcolm, as cited in NAA, A981/4GER 41/Memorandum on Pirow's Visit to Europe by Stirling, 21 December 1939., p. 2

stance on this latter point, the dominions do not appear to have succumbed to any ‘spirit of Munich.’ Their response to the new international situation was essentially practical; seeking to minimise their obligations, boost their defences, and assert their territorial claims. Pragmatism, rather than idealism, prevailed.

3: GERMANY REVEALED?

KRISTALLNACHT AND THE SPIRIT OF MUNICH

Charles Te Water noted in a 22 November 1938 report to his Prime Minister that *Kristallnacht* had had a dramatic impact on British attitudes to Germany 'so that, at the moment, little of the spirit of Munich is discernible.'¹ He went on to predict that this would have unforeseeable consequences for the colonial issue.² A number of historians have gone further, suggesting that the pogrom marked a permanent transformation in the way Britain viewed Germany. R. Douglas argued that it dispelled 'the Munich euphoria.'³ Certainly, as has been seen, the dominions, apart from Canada, had exhibited little evidence of unrestrained optimism in the immediate aftermath of Munich: strengthening their defences and quietly, or in Billy Hughes's case, not so quietly, ensuring their interests in the mandate system would not be ignored. Andrew Crozier instead considered *Kristallnacht* one of the main reasons why it became 'clear that Germany could not be contained within any rational international system' in November 1938 and that it drove Halifax into taking a tougher stance on Germany, which position is supported by Donald Cameron Watt.⁴ Paul Kennedy and Talbot Imlay likewise referred to 'the anger and disgust' the pogrom engendered, while Richard Overy judged it 'contributed powerfully to the revulsion against Hitlerism.'⁵ C. MacDonald even went so far as to assert that it 'blocked' any prospect of a European settlement.⁶ As previously seen, Ovendale also considered that 'Hitler with his anti-Semitic purges' (although admittedly in conjunction with demonstrations of his untrustworthiness as well as his barbarity) 'probably' was as influential in respect of the dominions as any acts of their own or British leaders.⁷ These views therefore assign *Kristallnacht* a pivotal role in

¹ NASA/ Te Water Papers (A78)/13/Correspondence/C. Te Water to J. B. M. Hertzog, 22/11/38

² *Idem.*

³ Douglas, R., 'Chamberlain and Appeasement' in *Fascist Challenge*, Mommsen & Kettenacker (Eds.), p.87

⁴ Crozier, A., *The Causes of the Second World War*, (Oxford, 1998), pp.147 & 244; Watt, D. C., *How War Came*, pp.88 - 91

⁵ Kennedy, P. and Imlay, T. 'Appeasement' in *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered*, Martel, G. (Ed.), (London, 1999), p.122; Overy, R., with Wheatcroft A., *The Road to War*, (London, 1999), p.111

⁶ MacDonald, C., 'Deterrent Diplomacy: Roosevelt and the Containment of Germany, 1939 - 1940' in *Paths to War: New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War*, Boyce, R. & Robertson, E. M. (Eds.), (London, 1989), pp.297 & 306

⁷ Ovendale, R., 'Appeasement', p.202; see also Introduction, above.

driving London to see the forces it confronted in a different light, and it is worth considering to what extent this was also true of the dominions.

If *Kristallnacht* created a different perception of Germany on the British side, then it also appeared that a different view of 'the spirit of Munich' prevailed in Berlin than in London, and one that was quite at odds with what the dominions might have hoped would be the case. As has been seen, the dominions were united in desiring a peaceful resolution to escalating international tensions, and what differences arose between them were focused on the best method of achieving this. Hitler, however, did not appear to have been in any way assuaged by the settlement, even if his speeches and press did not become 'definitely hostile' until after the pogrom, when the former had privately told a meeting of journalists that he no longer considered an understanding with Britain to be practical politics, because of Britain's intensifying rearmament, as Sir Cecil Day informed his government on 23 November 1938.⁸ Alfred Stirling similarly drew attention to the anti-British aspects of Hitler's *Bürgerbrau Keller* speech of 8th November in his report to Canberra, highlighting Hitler's use of British Opposition appeals on behalf of political prisoners to demonise the latter as tools of the foreigner, and the dictator's use of Churchill to justify continuing German armament.⁹ Massey also advised Ottawa that events since Munich demonstrated that 'real friendship' between Hitler and Britain was 'hardly possible.'¹⁰ However, he continued to hope for an 'agreement based on self-interest.' Even South Africa seemed to pick up on the hostility emanating from Berlin, with Dr. Gie noting on 1 December 1938 in a report to Pretoria, the curious fact that 'a crime committed in Paris is not allowed to disturb relations with France, but is used to stir up feeling against England here.'¹¹ He wondered if Hitler in fact continued to set any store by good relations with London. Te Water likewise described it as 'puzzling' that Berlin since Munich had 'deliberately' sought to widen 'the gap between Great Britain and Germany.'¹² Incomprehensibly to the High Commissioner, Hitler instead seemed to be set on a '*rapprochement* with France,' who had been Pretoria's villains of the piece during the recent crises.

⁸ NANS/W2619/108/3/6/Notes by Sir Cecil Day, 23 November 1938, pp.1-3.

⁹ NAA A981/4/Ger/8, Stirling to Canberra, 16 November 1938, pp.1 & 2

¹⁰ LAC EA/RG25/Vol.767/319-1, Reports from Canada House, Massey to Mackenzie King,

¹¹ NASA SAB/BTS/1/4/12 German Foreign Policy/Dr. Gie to Department of External Affairs, 1 December 1938

¹² NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13, Correspondence, C. Te Water to J. B. M. Hertzog 13 December 1938, p.2

It was one thing to identify this antagonism however; it was another to fit it into an analytical framework which could be used to make sense of prevailing international conditions. In this regard, it was important to distinguish between Nazism, Hitler and Germany. So long as undesirable developments could be attributed to elements within the movement or the Party, then the hope remained that more restrained elements, or Hitler himself, could be persuaded to intervene to stabilise the situation. Thus when the New Zealand newspaper *The Press* attributed *Kristallnacht* to the 'young Nazis' and explained that these must be allowed from time to time to blow off steam by going on the rampage, so that they were diverted from activities more directly harmful to the regime, it was actually reassuring its readership.¹³ It was only the 'young Nazis' who were depicted as being inherently prone to violence, the leadership, implicitly immune to any such tendencies, merely pandered to them to maintain its control. The audience could therefore comfort itself that even if those in control were depressingly amoral, they were at least motivated by concerns which seemed rational to the readers, and were to that extent, rendered safe. Stirling confined himself to informing Canberra on 16 November 1938 that 'anti-Jewish rioting on an unprecedented scale broke out' and (citing Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes) that the police had just stood by, except in the case of a store part owned by British Jews.¹⁴ As always, Stirling sought to avoid an explicit analysis, but while his report superficially inferred the disturbances were spontaneous, as they just 'broke out', his account of police behaviour suggested central direction and foreknowledge of what was to transpire, as it was unlikely the police would otherwise have differentiated, or been in a position to differentiate, between German and British Jewish property. In many ways, Stirling's account is the most frightening of all, as his refusal to address the issue of responsibility leaves the reader unclear as to how far up the state hierarchy this permeates. That this must have been quite far is of course inherent in the implied co-ordination of police and public, but Stirling made no attempt to assess the unity of the leadership, or the position of Hitler himself. In contrast, a week later Sir Cecil Day was clear in communicating Goebbels's responsibility to Wellington, recording that the latter 'exhibits the revolting spectacle of glorying in the recent German display of brutality.'¹⁵ Day noted, however, that Hitler had so far held his counsel on the matter. While this interpretation does implicate the leadership in the chaotic violence, it still leaves open the possibility that Hitler was somehow aloof, and therefore in some way remained approachable. Gie, on the other hand, in his 1 December 1938 report to Pretoria,

¹³ *The Press*, (Christchurch), 'The Jewish Problem', 15 November 1938, p.8

¹⁴ NAA A981/4/Ger/8/Stirling to Canberra, 16 November 1938, p.4

¹⁵ NANZ/W2619/108/3/6/Notes by Sir Cecil Day, 23 November 1938, pp.1-3

assumed Hitler's full support for the 'latest developments.'¹⁶ The South African's account also rationalised the danger away, though, by placing the pogrom in the context of a 'step by step programme.' This would see Hitler establish Germany's position in the East to his satisfaction without interference 'from simultaneous negotiations with England.' He could then take up the question of a final Anglo-German settlement afterwards. This reading goes further than others in assuming Hitler's support for the pogrom, but again renders this involvement safe by depicting it as a single aspect of a master-plan, that will ultimately deliver the Holy Grail of the peaceful resolution of all outstanding Anglo-German grievances.

If instead it became accepted that Hitler himself was the impediment to better relations, however, then a satisfactory solution would require more drastic measures. In his diary on 21 November Mackenzie King condemned German behaviour as 'appalling' in that they 'have allowed their younger [blank] to destroy Jewish property.'¹⁷ He continued in the same vein, noting that there had been a collaboration 'with the government to deal with Jews in higher position.' This all led him to conclude that 'with the Germans and the Japs we are facing an era of barbarism.' This meant 'there is tremendous danger of this country being attacked.' The only hope was if 'these two countries can be converted to the Christian attitude and outlook on life.' This version accepts a dangerous and irrational mindset has taken hold in Germany, that the government by implication is in its grasp, and that the German people are prepared to go along with it, although without themselves being converted to that viewpoint, but that war may yet be averted by a reversion to former values. Mackenzie King was therefore not yet ready to concede that war was inevitable, only that there was 'tremendous danger' it would occur, and was left clutching at the straw that it would take a change of heart on behalf of the Germans to prevent it, without any real indication how this might itself be brought about. Finally, if it appeared that the difficulties arose out of the German condition itself, then the problem expanded exponentially, leading to reflections such as Churchill's wartime musing on whether, to assuage their neighbours' concerns about Germany's future conduct, the German population could be permanently reduced through the segregation of German menfolk from their women.¹⁸

¹⁶ NASA/SAB/BTS/1/4 December 19 German Foreign Policy/Dr. Gie to Department of External Affairs, 1 December 1938

¹⁷ King, *Diary*, 127/849, Entry 12 November 1938

¹⁸ Churchill, W. S. C., as cited in Rothwell, V., *War Aims in the Second World War*, (Edinburgh, 2005), p.70

While dominion analysis of the implications of *Kristallnacht* for Berlin's future behaviour therefore varied considerably, the range of emotional reactions was much more homogenous. Sir Cecil Day's use of the terms 'brutal cruelty', 'revolting spectacle' and 'display of brutality' leave the reader in no doubt as to how he felt about German actions.¹⁹ Massey confined himself to observing to Ottawa that 'recent events' in Germany precluded any possibility of friendship between the governments in London and Berlin while still hoping a mutually acceptable *modus vivendi* could be reached, but, as previously noted, Mackenzie King described German behaviour in his diary as 'appalling', and heralding 'a new era of barbarism' while 'the sorrows which the Jews have to bear at this time is almost beyond comprehension.'²⁰ Stirling's reservation about providing direct personal input in his reports to Canberra, complicates the picture, but not greatly. While there is no explicit condemnation of German actions, his choice of material for his report home of 16 November 1938 cannot be used to construct a support for them.²¹ He cited Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes report of looting in contradiction of Goebbels's denial that any such events took place, and the lack of police action in support of law and order except in the case of a part British owned store. He also noted that Goebbels tried to explain German actions to the foreign press, but clearly did not consider these explanations sufficiently credible to warrant any exposition, however, in contrast, he reported in detail Lord Halifax's complaint at the attribution of responsibility for the murder to British statesmen by certain elements of the German press. The facts may not speak for themselves, but their selection does. Even Pirow, whose agenda, as has been seen, could only benefit from a sympathetic depiction of Germany, condemned the pogrom as 'primitive' in his biography of Hertzog, although he was writing some 20 years after the events he was describing.²² At the time, however, Pretoria generally responded sympathetically to complaints from the dictatorships about criticism of their activities in the South African Press, and would even go on to contemplate a Press Law which would limit still further the rights of newspapers on this issue, but, when faced with German complaints about their treatment over *Kristallnacht*, Bodenstein, the head of External Affairs, came up with the robust retort that on this, the Germans had only themselves to blame, in which he

¹⁹ NANZ W2619/108/3/6, Notes by Sir Cecil Day, 23 November 1938, p.1

²⁰ LAC EA/RG25/Vol.767/319-1, Reports from Canada House, Massey to Mackenzie King; King, *Diary*, 127/849, Entry 12 November 1938

²¹ NAA A981/4/Ger/8, Stirling to Canberra, 16 November 1938, p.4

²² Pirow, *Hertzog*, p.234; see also Chapter One, above.

was backed by Hertzog, as Clark reported to London.²³ The immediate dominion reaction to the pogrom can therefore only be characterised as hostile. There was no suggestion of any sympathy for Germany on the issue, condemnation was universal. This was important because it demonstrated the gulf that existed between the German viewpoint on the one hand, and the dominion (as well as British) one on the other. Their immediate revulsion in the pogrom's aftermath meant Germany could currently expect little by way of sympathetic treatment (as evidenced by the South African rejection of German complaints, noted above), whatever the dominions' assessment of its impact on the future prospects for peace might be.

Dominion Attitudes to Immigration in the Wake of Kristallnacht

These, however, only represented the dominions immediate reactions to events in Germany. Of more significance was how *Kristallnacht* impacted on views of Nazism, Hitler and Germany in the longer term, when the immediate emotional impact had had a chance to fade. Unfortunately, none of the dominions left a record tracing this development, so it has instead to be inferred from their subsequent actions, particularly in regard to immigration which was the policy area most gravely impacted by the pogrom, but also with regard to other areas, such as maintaining a dialogue with Germany, where these are applicable (as with Pirow's visit to Germany). Latent anti-Semitism certainly played a part in this. Sometime after the outbreak of war, Savage stated in a broadcast that 'more blood must come into this country, for if we don't fill it, we shall not hold it.'²⁴ However, only 111 persons of German origin entered the country between January 1939 and December 1945 in contrast to 135 Greeks in the same period, a time when German Jewish emigration was reaching new heights in the wake of *Kristallnacht*.²⁵ Walter Nash who had ultimate responsibility for immigration in that country, likewise explained in a letter to a concerned citizen that assimilability was a key concern in deciding who should be admitted, that 'for the sake of the refugees themselves this must be a prior consideration.'²⁶ Therefore 'we must never create a situation where there is any antagonism whatsoever in our country to refugees who have come to our shores.'²⁷ While not explicit, this does have anti-Semitic overtones in that the assimilability of the refugees, the bulk of whom would have been, and been expected to be, Jewish, is called into question, without reference to any discernible criteria which could be addressed or refuted. It

²³ TNA DO 35, 540/C87/26, Clark to Harding, 30 November 1938, p.3; NASA *Hertzog Papers*/A32/Vol. 108, Cuttings, Freedom of the Press, *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 August 1939; TNA DO 35, 540/C87/26, Clark to Harding, 30 November 1938, pp.2 - 3

²⁴ NANZ Nash/1177/0319 - 0430, Notes for broadcast by Savage

²⁵ NANZ L/25.3/Record of Entry Permits

²⁶ NANZ Nash/1311, Nash to Mrs. John Hall, 21/3/39

²⁷ *Idem*

also scare-mongered that a more generous admission policy would provoke a backlash that would create conditions worse than the refugees already had to cope with (as otherwise it would scarcely be in their interest for assimilability to be as key a concern as Nash claims). Pirow likewise was coy about his stance on the Jewish question, merely stating in his biography of Hertzog that his views were 'well-known'.²⁸ However, his description of *Kristallnacht* depicted the Jewish community as powerful enough to force Chamberlain to recall the British Ambassador, such presumptions about Jewish power being something he seemed to share with the Nazis.²⁹ Hertzog is rather more difficult to place. Certainly the South African Jewish community was fulsome in its praise of him, but this seems not to have been for any positive achievement of his own but rather because he was opposed to Dr. Malan at this point, and Dr. Malan (via Eric Louw, the former South African minister in Paris) was then dabbling in populist anti-Semitism.³⁰ Hertzog did, however, accept an invitation to dinner at the home of the German minister (admittedly while rejecting one for a cocktail party for the 30th November) at a time when other governments were publicly displaying their disapproval of German actions by withdrawing their representatives for consultation.³¹ This is all the more noteworthy as Hertzog routinely rejected most invitations which came his way, even on occasion from the Governor-General, possibly because of his wife's ill-health, although this rarely seemed to interfere with occasions of personal interest to the General, such as engagements which promoted the Dutch connection.³² In fairness, in a very unusual happenstance, he appears to have actually managed to double-book himself on this occasion, so it is not entirely clear which, if either, of the events he in fact attended.³³ Nevertheless, it remains significant that he would even contemplate gracing with his presence an event organised by the German representative at this delicate time. Smuts, on the other hand, was a Zionist, but a Zionist who felt that with Jews forming around 5 - 6% of the population, South Africa could scarcely be expected to accept more, which demonstrated the

²⁸ Pirow, *Hertzog*, p.238

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.234 - 5

³⁰ See, for instance, NASA/*Hertzog Papers*/A32/Vol. 1/South African Jewish Times, 7 July 1939, *Ibid.*, South African Jewish Board of Deputies to Hertzog, 18 July 1939; for contemporary Malanite anti-Semitism, see for instance, NASA/*Hertzog Papers*/A32/Vol. 123/"Die Jode-Debat", *Die Burger*, 22 February 1939

³¹ NASA *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.5, *Korrespondie*, Hertzog to Leitner 'Cocktail Party', 26 November 1938; NASA *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.5, *Korrespondie*, Hertzog to Leitner 'Dinner', 26 November 1938

³² NASA *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.5, *Korrespondie*, Hertzog to Duncan, 5 December 1938; UCT *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), Personal Miscellaneous Letters 1936+, Clark to Eden, 13 September 1939, p.2; See, for instance, NASA/*Hertzog Papers*/A32/Vol.5/Hertzog to Mayor of Capetown, 2 September 1938

³³ NASA *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.5, *Korrespondie*, Hertzog to Mrs. Stuttford, 29 November 1938

limitations on practical support that the Jews could expect at this time, even from those who were ostensibly their friends.³⁴

In Canada, Mackenzie King was sympathetic but his cabinet and particularly his *Quebecois* lieutenant, Ernest Lapointe, were more inclined to pander to anti-Semitism, especially as regards Quebec, as King noted in his diary.³⁵ In the civil service, Skelton commented in an internal paper 'that refugees (and their friends) should be treated like criminals merely because they tell lies in their efforts to find sanctuary.'³⁶ He therefore appeared to be reasonably compassionate in regard to the plight of Jewish refugees, but Blair, the formidable Director of Immigration, was anything but, opining in a report as early as 25 March 1938 that 'because the Jew can organise his affairs better than others, he has managed to fill most of the [U.S.] quotas from certain countries.'³⁷ The Canadian Governor-General in expressing a desire 'to be in on' any scheme for Jewish immigration, based on his previous experience in Palestine, likewise reflected popular prejudice in believing 'it was amazing the amounts that they [the Jews] have, secreted away.'³⁸ Massey also clearly preferred admission of the non-Jewish Sudeten German refugees, writing to his Prime Minister on 29 November 1938: 'these appear to be more desirable settlers than any other refugees and if we could take a substantial number of them it would place us in a much stronger position in relation to appeals from and on behalf of non-Aryans.'³⁹

Mackenzie King, however, was more compassionate, writing in his diary on 12 November that 'something will have to be done by our country to assist in this phase of the world situation.'⁴⁰ The next day he likewise recorded that 'Canada must do her part in admitting some of the Jewish refugees.'⁴¹ However, he continued prophetically 'I may not be able to get the Cabinet to consent, but will fight for it as right and just and Christian.' This defeatist attitude reflected his own inherent impulse to avoid decisive action. For the moment, however, his quixotic tendencies still dominated his instinctive caution, noting in his diary of a case brought to his attention 'I felt it was inhuman of our Department of Immigration to allow that child to be returned.'⁴² He still did not raise the question in Cabinet until the 22nd

³⁴ NASA *Hertzog Papers* (A32), Vol.123, *Cape Times*, 19 May 1939; NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1), Vol.243, Smuts to M. Gillett, 10 June 1939

³⁵ King, *Diary*, 128/937, Entry 29 November 1938 & 128/944, Entry 1 December 1938

³⁶ LAC EA/RG25/Vol.1871/327/5, Evian, Skelton, O. D. S., "Comments on Mr. McPherson's Memorandum re Refugees", 6 March 1940, p.2

³⁷ LAC EA/RG25/Vol.1870/327/1, Evian, Memorandum by F. C. Blair, 25/3/38, p.1

³⁸ Buchan, J., Lord Tweedsmuir, as cited in King, *Diary*, 127/856, Entry 14 November 1938

³⁹ LAC EA/RG25/Vol.1871/327/2, Evian, Massey to Mackenzie King, 29 November 1938

⁴⁰ King, *Diary*, 127/849, Entry 12 November 1938

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 127/851, Entry 13 November 1938

⁴² *Ibid.*, 127/855, Entry 14 November 1938

November, and even then very indirectly, excusing himself in his diary that 'I saw it was not opportune.'⁴³ He then retreated somewhat, deciding that 'the whole question will have to be carefully studied.' This seemed to indicate a weakening of his previous resolve to act decisively, although he did manage to obtain agreement for treatment similar to the U.S. for passport-holders already in Canada.

In a meeting with Jewish representatives, who were pressing (very reasonably, both in manner and objective, even in Mackenzie King's own opinion as he described in his diary) for the admission of 10 thousand refugees, he backpedalled further, citing unemployment, the danger of provoking anti-Semitism, the problems of the constituencies and government supporters, and avoided any kind of commitment by stressing the need for 'the utmost care' in dealing with the issue.⁴⁴ He attempted an emotive appeal to Cabinet on the 24th, but this foundered somewhat according to his journal ('I did not get any real response'), although he did obtain the concession that 'if necessary' they might 'put through a vote which would help to find homes for refugees in some land other than our own.'⁴⁵ This led him to (somewhat forlornly) reposition himself: 'I did not wish to press the matter, but to get the point across at this meeting.' Five days later Mackenzie King recorded that cabinet had at least agreed to representation at the continuation of the Evian Conference on refugees that was to meet in London, but Lapointe, while carefully distancing himself from association with his constituents, privately informed his Prime Minister, who duly recorded it in his diary, that 'the Jewish question was anathema' as far as Quebec was concerned.⁴⁶ The issue returned to Cabinet on the 1st December, when King noted that Crerar, the minister responsible for immigration, argued in favour of admitting 10,000 refugees (as had been requested by the Jewish representatives, above).⁴⁷ The Canadian Prime Minister despondently continued that cabinet remained generally opposed to quotas and the Quebec ministers remained 'strongly against any admission.'

Mackenzie King therefore sought to avoid responsibility for the matter by using the British North America Act to shift liability for any move onto the provinces, a position he and cabinet reiterated at a meeting with a delegation on refugees the following week, thereby avoiding antagonising the *Quebecois* but also providing the other provinces with the opportunity to avoid acceptance of refugees.⁴⁸ This naturally made it harder to accomplish

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 22 November 1938

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23 November 1938

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24 November 1938

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 29 November 1938

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1 December 1938

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7 December 1938; King, *Diary*, 1 December 1938

Mackenzie King's stated objective of doing something concrete for the latter, but, as previously noted, as he told Skelton, 'we have to keep our own position in mind.'⁴⁹ He was however successful in this time getting Cabinet to commit in writing to not returning refugees already in Canada to countries where they faced persecution.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, he effectively accepted defeat in his diary on the general issue on the 21st, with Cabinet's decision not to change Canada's immigration laws, albeit with the meaningless concession of 'agreeing to have humanitarian considerations in mind in interpreting regulations regarding Jews.'⁵¹ He conceded cabinet, while confirming its previous concession regarding the status of Jews already in Canada, was opposed to admitting any more lest this engender anti-Semitism, but was more generously inclined towards the Sudeten refugees.

This effectively spelled the end of Mackenzie King's quixotic effort to come to the aid of the Jews in the wake of *Kristallnacht*. Cabinet had worn down his idealistic aspirations with their pragmatic arguments, mainly, but not exclusively, based on the perceived inclinations of the *Quebecois* electorate; thereby allowing his naturally excessive sense of caution to reassert itself. 'The something which will have to be done by our country' had turned out to be disappointingly small in practice.⁵² Those already in the country might be allowed to stay, but these would include few whose emigration had not already been at least in progress at the time of *Kristallnacht*, and the laws would not be changed to aid the plight of more recent refugees. Those whose danger had been revealed by the pogrom would have to look elsewhere, except to the extent that 'humanitarian considerations' might be applied, which would largely be down to the staff of the Department of Immigration and the unsympathetic Blair, rather than the relatively well-disposed Mackenzie King. In fairness, it should be pointed out that the Spanish and Catalan refugees faced an even more united opposition to any consideration of their admission at this time as indicated in the government file on the subject.⁵³

Australia could not contemplate accepting more than 'a small proportion of the thousands of applications received' from European Jews, because of its 'limited absorptive capacity' (a July 1939 memorandum placed Australia's optimum population as between 10 and 100 million, with Menzies and Page advocating 20 and 30 million, respectively; at a time when

⁴⁹ LAC EA/RG25/Vol.1871, Evian, 327/3, File note by Skelton, 1 December 1938

⁵⁰ King, *Diary*, 128/944, Entry 1 December 1938

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 21 December 1938

⁵² King, *Diary*, 127/849, Entry 29 November 1938

⁵³ LAC EA/RG25/Vol.1899/274, Spanish Refugees

the actual population was c. 6 million).⁵⁴ At this time it was subsidising the migration of British officials from India and considering encouraging Danish, Dutch and Swiss migration (specifically excluding Jews), although Hodgson did consider that the current impetus to migrate, including migration for 'racial' reasons, provided Australia with a perhaps final opportunity to acquire 'a good type of migrant.'⁵⁵ The government also ran a general assisted migration scheme for any 'White British Subject in the United Kingdom' nominated by an approved person or body.⁵⁶

In light of this, Canberra undertook to accept 15,000 refugees from all sources in a clear effort to pre-empt any external pressure being applied to accept greater numbers of refugees, which, on 31 January 1939, the government privately allocated on an annual basis as 4,000 places to be awarded to Jews and 1,000 to 'Aryans and non-Aryan Christians.'⁵⁷ However, cabinet gave permission for the quota to be breached in respect of the latter, so their seeming generosity toward the Jewish community was rather less than it first appeared. In an uncharacteristically compassionate moment, the administration did nonetheless decide on 14 February that applications by up to five hundred parents of persons already living in Australia would not count against this quota, providing the father was 55 or older, as 'the parents may be generally regarded as non-competitive in the labour market.'⁵⁸ The next day, however, a proposed Jewish colony in New Guinea was 'not agreed to.'⁵⁹

Immigration policy was equally not an area where the Savage government in New Zealand displayed exemplary leadership. Assurances were given that matters were under consideration, but no record remains of any such deliberations, and no policy decisions were ever announced. Nor, despite their perennial hostility to Labour, did the newspapers seem much inclined to push them on this issue. With the exception of *The Press*⁶⁰, which produced an editorial sharply condemning the government's supine inactivity on this front after

⁵⁴ NAA A981/MIG/52/Part II, Dept. of Interior to Dept. of Exterior, 29 June 1938; NAA A981/MIG/52/Part II, 'References to, and Notes on Migration' Memorandum, 18 July 1939 p.3; Day D., *Claiming a Continent: A New History of Australia*, (Sydney, 1997), p.200; NAA A981/MIG/52/Part II, Dept. of Interior to Dept. of Exterior, 29 June 1938

⁵⁵ NAA A981/MIG/52/Part II/Dept. of Interior to Dept. of Exterior, 27 June 1938; NAA A981/MIG/52/Part II, 'Alien Migration' Memorandum, 2 November 1938, p.2, see also, *Ibid.*, 'References to, and Notes on Migration' Memorandum, 18 July 1939 p.2; NAA A981/MIG/52/Part II, Hodgson to P.M.'s Dept., 20 January 1939

⁵⁶ NAA A981/MIG/52/Part II, Dept. of Interior to Dept. of Exterior, 8 June 1939

⁵⁷ NAA A981/4/Ref/1, Transcript forwarded by Lyons to St. Vincent de Paul Society, Dublin, 12 December 1938 & NAA A2694 Vol.19, Parts I & II, Cabinet Minutes, Cabinet Memorandum 'Refugees', 31 January 1939, p.1

⁵⁸ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Parts I & II, Cabinet Minutes, 14 February 1939, p.2 & Cabinet Memorandum

'Jewish Refugees: Question of Excluding Parents from Quota Restrictions', 31 January 1939, p.1

⁵⁹ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Parts I & II, Cabinet Minutes, 15 February 1939

⁶⁰ *The Press*, 'The Government and Refugees', 18 November 1938, p.12

Kristallnacht, the universal condemnatory coverage of Germany did not translate into calls either for greater generosity in the admission of refugees, or even greater clarification by the government as to what its immigration policy actually might be. Where the press failed, the opposition might have been expected to take up the mantle. Parliament was not sitting, but the National Party could have either publicly stated what their own position was, thereby pressurising the government into also making their stance clear, or directly demanded the government take action. Instead, Hamilton, Coates and company kept their own counsel. Press and opposition singularly failed to hold the government to account, and it was left to other bodies, such as the North Canterbury Methodist Synod, which as reported in *The Press* for 17 November 1938, appealed to the government to actively encourage the immigration of refugees.⁶¹ ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’ would seem to have been the order of the day for all concerned.

There was one case, however, which Cabinet’s fingerprints were all over. The New Zealand government’s predilection for cherry-picking refugees whose immigration would benefit their new hosts, was not confined to the Sudeten Germans. As previously seen, Savage would threaten to permit the entry of refugee doctors to break what he saw as the industrial action of the B.M.A. in attempting to resist the implementation of the government’s national health legislation. Similarly, Sullivan, the Minister for Scientific and Industrial Research, jumped at the opportunity to acquire the services of a Dr. Rosa Stern of Vienna for the Wheat Research Institute, proposing to cabinet that the government approve the appointment and grant entry permits to Dr. Stern and her mother.⁶² Cabinet approved the former proposal, but rejected the latter, scoring a line through that part of the proposition with Joe Savage’s initials as authority, thereby leaving the pair to the vagaries of the immigration system. There was never, of course, any suggestion that Dr. Stern’s application would encounter any difficulty, given Cabinet’s approval for her appointment, but her mother was a different matter, and she would need to demonstrate her ability to avoid becoming a burden on the public purse, not an easy task for a 76 year old widowed housewife.⁶³ Fortunately, Dr. Stern, however, was evidently able to demonstrate her ability to provide for her mother, as both were granted entry permits on the 4th April, 1939, but only arriving in Auckland on the 1st August 1939 and acquiring New Zealand nationality after the war.⁶⁴ In truth, Dr. Stern’s mother was probably never at risk, because of the former’s presumed earning capacity and consequent capability to look after her mother financially, but the incident is nevertheless

⁶¹ *The Press*, 17 November 1938, p.4

⁶² NANZ Nash/2044, Cabinet Schedule 28 February 1939

⁶³ NANZ IA/1/115/1813, Hedwig Stern

⁶⁴ NANZ ABKF/8012/W4741/13/C22_46_3362 & 3; NANZ IA/1/115/1813 & 2229 (Hedwig & Rosa Stern, respectively).

extremely revealing about Cabinet's attitude towards the refugees post-*Kristallnacht* and its consequences for those unfortunates. Clearly Dr. Stern could not take up her position without an entry permit, and the terms offered were evidently sufficient to convince the authorities that she would be able to financially support her mother, but Cabinet was nonetheless not prepared to authorise this, despite the presence of the ministers who would ultimately make the decision, ensuring that Dr. Stern and her mother would have to wait another month before receiving exactly the same decision as that originally proposed.⁶⁵ Jack Lee castigated the triumvirate and its adherents as petty-minded union officials, and it is hard not to extend that judgement here. It was not for Cabinet to make such decisions (even though the minister making the decision was present), the proper channels had to be followed and the rules observed, even though this would provide exactly the same outcome, but at a later date, and at a commensurately greater risk to the applicants.⁶⁶ Skelton in Canada, as noted above, might understand the necessity of relaxing the strict letter of the law in face of the extraordinary circumstances with which the dominions were faced, but Joe Savage and his colleagues appear to have been incapable of appreciating this bigger picture. The lack of urgency displayed here, reiterated the government's inability to empathise with the plight of the refugees, previously seen in Savage's intemperate threat to admit large numbers of refugee medical practitioners to break the doctors' resistance to his policies. The proposal about the Sterns had been placed before Cabinet at the end of February, but clearly would have had to be in progress for some time to reach this stage, so it is not unreasonable to suppose that Dr. Stern began seeking a safe haven in the immediate aftermath of the pogrom. It took a further month to acquire entry permits, and eventually the Sterns managed to arrive in New Zealand with just over a month to spare before the outbreak of war. It would not have taken much to go wrong for this to have had fatal consequences, and it is hard not to conclude that at least part of the reason for the paltry figure of 111 refugees from Germany and Austria received between the wake of *Kristallnacht* and the end of the war, noted above, was because of the pedantic bureaucracy involved in the application process.

It is therefore hard not to concur with Goldman, the historian of the Jewish community in New Zealand, that while 'the Government of New Zealand expressed a great deal of sympathy... it was prepared to do very little to grant refugees relief.'⁶⁷ F. A. de la Mare, 'an ardent supporter of the League of Nations' and member of the University of New Zealand Senate, wrote to Nash at the time castigating the Government's position as being: 'for

⁶⁵ NANZ Nash/2044, Cabinet Schedule 28 February 1939

⁶⁶ Lee, J. A., *op. cit.*, p.99

⁶⁷ Goldman, L. M., *The History of the Jews in New Zealand*, (Wellington, 1958), p.226

practical reasons, we must let these human beings suffer and die while we can help them.’⁶⁸ De la Mare continued that New Zealand should instead be prepared to accept the test implicit in the risk that a more generous immigration policy would provoke anti-Semitism, and that it was wrong in principle to seek guarantors for refugees as it effectively created ‘one law for the rich and another for the poor.’ He cited the case of a skilled worker who had been excluded on these grounds, despite having obtained employment, but Nash’s deputy, Fagan, while recognising the slightness of the risk to the public purse, saw no way to reopen the case. Nash did not appear to dispute any of these points, merely indicating that the document should be filed in a ‘special “Refugees” File.’

The situation was further complicated by New Zealand’s refusal to officially acknowledge the existence of the Jews for the purposes of immigration.⁶⁹ While this might at first seem like high-minded principle in refusing to distinguish Jews from their non-Jewish fellow citizens, in practice it made a bad situation worse. Firstly, it made it impossible to identify how many Jews were being admitted. Undoubtedly, many of the 1,700 Germans admitted between the resumption of immigration and the outbreak of war in September were Jews, but it will never be clear how many. Secondly, arising from this, as no track was kept of the admission or exclusion of Jews, it was not possible to identify whether disproportionate numbers of Jews were being excluded. If such residual anti-Semitism as might exist could not be identified, then steps could not be taken to counter it. Finally, the non-identification of Jews meant that no provision could be made for the more generous treatment of their cases in view of the special circumstances that they faced within Germany. *Kristallnacht* changed none of this.

Dominion Attitudes to Defence in the Wake of Kristallnacht

If *Kristallnacht* did not change the New Zealand government’s attitude towards immigration, it, at least indirectly, appears to have given renewed impetus to efforts for Antipodean co-operation over defence. Savage now revived the idea of a conference between Britain, Australia and New Zealand, writing again to Lyons and this time meeting with more encouragement.⁷⁰ Although New Zealand’s reaction to *Kristallnacht* itself had been restricted to little more than sympathetic noises, coupled with a determination to minimise its

⁶⁸ G. P. Barton, 'de la Mare, Frederick Archibald - Biography', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10
URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3d4/1>; NANZ Nash/1311, de la Mare, F. A. to Nash, 20 December 1938, 'The Refugee Problem', pp.1 - 3

⁶⁹ NANZ PM/32/3/1/Pt. 1a, Immigration Restrictions Report, 9 December 1935, pp.2 - 3

⁷⁰ NAA A981/PAC/1/Savage to Lyons, 22 December 1938

responsibilities, the timing of this communication is unlikely to have been coincidental, if for no other reason than the sharp deterioration in Anglo-German relations that emerged in the wake of the pogrom, as noted above. This latter development could only make war more likely, thereby increasing the risks faced by the antipodean dominions, in so doing reinforcing the attractions of a conference for New Zealand, and equally weakening Australian resistance to such a measure. It is therefore scarcely surprising that, after addressing the distractions provided by Caucus's attempt to take control of the election of Cabinet and the Lee Letter, Savage chose this point to revisit his proposal. The New Zealand Chiefs of Staff also feared that, as Australia's defences took shape, 'so will an enemy be driven more and more to concentrate against New Zealand's trade.'⁷¹ New Zealand therefore wanted a broad conference between Britain, New Zealand and Australia, which would consider all aspects of political, military and economic strategy in the region.⁷²

This agenda was the reason for Australia's previous lack of enthusiasm and, even now, they wished to confine it to purely military matters. Their concern was that any conference would provoke the Japanese, encourage American isolationism and antagonise American interventionists. Colonel Hodgson, the permanent head of the Department of External Affairs, produced a memorandum for the government that expounded these fears.⁷³ The Japanese would conclude that such a conference was primarily directed against them, and would turn unwelcome attention towards the Southern Pacific. American isolationists would cite it as evidence that the Commonwealth was drawing together to counter Japan, and hence there was no longer any need for America to concern itself with the matter. American interventionists would therefore lose a strand of their argument in favour of action, but also might interpret the exclusion of the United States as evidence that the Commonwealth was displaying an unwelcome assertiveness in the region at a time when America was swallowing up small islands of questionable title across the area. Such an eventuality would not only hamper future prospects of co-operation against Japan, should these prove necessary, it might also inhibit collaboration in the development of the region, an enterprise in which the Americans were already proving tougher negotiators than the Australians would have preferred. Antagonising them needlessly therefore seemed like neither good politics, nor good business. Nonetheless, the Australians were now at least prepared to unbend sufficiently to contemplate a conference restricted to military matters.

⁷¹ NANZ Nash/1262/War Prep, Rept. Of the Chiefs of Staff, 31 December 1938, p.

⁷² NAA A981/PAC/1, Savage to Lyons & Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 24 January 1939

⁷³ NAA A981/PAC/1, 'Pacific Conference' by Col. Hodgson, 4 February 1939, p.2

As has been seen, like New Zealand, there is little evidence that *Kristallnacht* directly impacted government attitudes in Australia, and it seems more likely that in Canberra, as in Wellington, that it was actually the evident deterioration of Anglo-German relations in the wake of the pogrom, that proved decisive in changing the prevailing mind-set even to this limited extent. Further than this they were not prepared to go and accordingly they telegraphed Wellington for clarification on the proposed scope of the conference, to which New Zealand responded that they wished the discussions to cover 'all those political, economic and geographical considerations which would arise in a simultaneous war in Europe and the Far East.'⁷⁴ This was more or less precisely what the Australians did not want. While consensus on the agenda could therefore not yet be achieved, the principle of the desirability of a conference had been accepted and discussions continued without actually reaching impasse.

The South African Minister of Defence's reaction to *Kristallnacht*, as he described it in his biography of Hertzog, was telling.⁷⁵ Pirow acknowledged its significance for the German Jewish community and castigated German behaviour as 'primitive', albeit while attributing the hostile worldwide reaction to 'International Jewry.' His frustration with the situation, and the impact it was likely to have on his mission to Germany boiled over when considering the origins of the episode: it was 'silly' and 'idiotic'; while the people involved were 'unknown' and 'unimportant.' It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Pirow felt it was awfully inconsiderate of these insignificant, inconsequential people to jeopardise his extremely important mission, by their involvement in their inane and ridiculous drama. Pirow was, of course, writing some twenty years after the events he was describing, but managed to overlook some of the more salient features of the episode, implying that the demonstrations were spontaneous rather than engineered by the Nazi hierarchy.

Pirow, building on his coyness about his evident anti-Semitism (see above), was also keen to distance himself from the brutality of the incident, describing German behaviour as 'primitive,' as has been seen, and depicting himself as standing up to Ribbentrop, when the latter tried to defend what had transpired. In contrast, Goering was depicted as entirely pragmatic about the situation, dismissing the incident as a 'stupidity' which he had had to clear up. All of these points were designed to promote Pirow's agenda, namely that Nazi Germany was an entity the West could and should have done business with. *Kristallnacht*, because of its timing in connection with Pirow's mission could not be ignored, and he duly

⁷⁴ NAA A981/PAC/1, Lyons to Savage & Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 11 January 1939; NAA A981/PAC/1, Savage to Lyons & Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 24 January 1939

⁷⁵ Pirow, *Hertzog*, pp.234 – 40.

paid attention to it. In so doing taking care to establish himself as one who would never condone this sort of behaviour, however he felt about the Jews, but its significance was downplayed by the implication it was spontaneous, rather than government-inspired, and by associating support for it with Ribbentrop, whose incompetence was trumpeted by Pirow, not least because the latter chose to blame the German Foreign Minister for the failure of his mission. This was in contrast to Goering, who Pirow saw as supportive and who was therefore depicted in a positive light. By emphasising Goering's pragmatism, and implied competence, in contrast to Ribbentrop's implied shortcomings in these areas, Pirow appears to be implying that Germany continued to be an acceptable partner, on the assumption that the supposed pragmatic competence of a Goering was always likely to trump the undoubted fanatical incompetence of a Ribbentrop.

Pirow also tried to depict himself as a disinterested observer, by expressing himself as 'disappointed' in Hitler and contrasting the latter's 1938 self with the 'John the Baptist in jack-boots' of 1933, when they had previously met, thus giving more weight to the idea that Pirow was in fact a shrewd observer of the Nazi state, rather than a naive and uncritical admirer. He could therefore be trusted to form a responsible judgement as to whether the West should confront or conciliate Berlin. By doing this, Pirow was keeping alive the central idea of his biography of Hertzog; that the West had been wrong to engage Hitler in conflict, and that the General had been right to try to keep South Africa out of the war.

In point of fact, without *Kristallnacht*, Pirow would have had little to discuss in Berlin. It is true that the episode precluded the possibility of British involvement in the Colonial question, but it was always unlikely they would have chosen Pirow as a conduit for such discussions, given the presence of their own embassy in Berlin and their responsibilities to Australia and New Zealand on the issue. Pirow could only have expected to play a pivotal role in bilateral negotiations involving Germany and South Africa alone. Unfortunately for him, as previously seen, his experiences in Brussels and Lisbon prevented him from bringing any new proposals to the table; he was forced to admit that the colonies themselves would not be returned, and all he could do was offer financial compensation, which had been tried previously without any success, and which Hitler dismissed with the words that the issue could 'just as well wait another five or six years.' As Pirow indicated, this did not actually amount to an outright rejection of the proposal, but in reality indicated Hitler's lack of interest. Andrew Crozier suggested Hitler was sincere in his demands for the return of the Colonies, but has to resort to Hitler's second book to support this argument. In reality, there

is little evidence that this was the case, particularly as the colonies were liable to prove as indefensible in the event of the war Hitler was now considering, as on the previous occasion.

Kristallnacht, however, provided Pirow with a last chance to pull his mission out of the fire. Even a bilateral Colonial settlement might be beyond him, but if he could lay the foundation for a new Anglo-German understanding in the wake of the pogrom, he would be able to return home in triumph, and it is clear from his correspondence after the event that he was desperate to elicit some kind of success from the episode. For instance he wrote on 4 February 1939 to his friend, Te Water, suggesting the latter plant a story in the Times to 'the effect that my visit assisted in eliminating some of the then existing misunderstanding.'⁷⁶ This was to try and offset the criticism provided by the South African press, which 'has been as hostile as the English Press.' Somewhat paradoxically, however, Te Water was not to 'go to any trouble,' as 'I would rather be cursed than praised as far as our local press is concerned.' Te Water seems also to have been keen to read something positive into the negotiations, as he had written to Gie on 14 December 1938 'the news about the Jews is interesting – "for thou shalt find it after many days". Has the little seed taken root?'⁷⁷ While it is not clear what 'news' Te Water is talking about, the comments immediately follow mention of Pirow, and suggests Te Water is briefly optimistic that Pirow's talks may have borne fruit after all.

It is therefore unsurprising that no consideration seems to have been given to postponing the trip, even under the adverse circumstances it now progressed under. According to his account in *Hertzog*, Pirow was approached in London by Captain Victor Cazalet with a view to sounding out the German government on a proposal that the German Jews be allowed to depart Germany with half their wealth (and that the British and American Jews would then reimburse the refugees for the half that had been forfeited) for Tanganyika, Madagascar, or Guiana.⁷⁸ Then, at a second meeting with Chamberlain, Pirow interpreted the British Prime Minister's apparent willingness to co-operate with this scheme, together with some pious platitudes regarding German interests in Eastern Europe, as evidence 'that if Hitler would appease British public opinion on the Jewish question, he might well be granted a free hand in Eastern Europe.' This the South African forlornly repeated to the German Chancellor, when his proposals foundered on the latter's objection to the use of Tanganyika as a new homeland for the Jews (Te Water had earlier reported Chamberlain as being prepared to

⁷⁶ NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14, Correspondence, Pirow to Te Water 4 February 1939, pp.2

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⁷⁷ NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.14, C. Te Water to Dr. F. S. N. Gie 14 December 1938

⁷⁸ Pirow, *Hertzog*, pp.233 - 4

offer Germany Tanganyika prior to the *Anschluss*), and German curiosity as to France's attitude on the use of Madagascar, which Pirow had not troubled to discover before offering it up as a destination.⁷⁹ Guiana does not appear to have been mentioned. It is unclear what influence this exchange actually had, but it can only have served to confirm Hitler, however slightly, in his opinions both of British disinterest in Eastern Europe and the all-pervasive nature of Jewish influence. That Pirow reiterated this position in Rome can only have compounded the problem.

Pirow had in any event (he does not explain how) become convinced that all the military preparations he had witnessed (which he had not previously mentioned) were due to complete in the Spring, and 'that unless there was a complete change of heart in international affairs', that war would then break out.⁸⁰ This view reflected Charles Te Water's and may, in fact, have originated there, which would explain Pirow's curious lack of detail on the subject. The South African High Commissioner in London reiterated this point to Hertzog on 13 December 1938, stating 'that my own view has always been that the moment of supreme danger' would come when 'the peak of armaments is reached by the Great Powers.'⁸¹ This analysis was not particularly helpful, however, as it was always likely armaments would reach an unintentional peak immediately prior to the outbreak of war, as the latter would inevitably lead to the consumption and attrition of the former (particularly munitions), rather than their continued stockpiling. In retrospect then, armaments would be seen to have peaked just prior to war, but observers could not use this to predict when such an outbreak would actually take place. Pirow came close to acknowledging this by admitting that war 'did not in fact break out because the Allies were not yet ready: but at the time Germany annexed Bohemia and Moravia, an incident which ordinarily would have led to a general conflagration.'⁸² Pirow went on to describe how when he returned home he found Smuts already convinced of this analysis.⁸³ In fact, as previously seen, the South African government, whatever it might say in public, had not been particularly behaving as if it was truly convinced that peace had been firmly established by the Munich Settlement, and it is probably more accurate to say that the pogrom and its aftermath simply confirmed them in this view.

⁷⁹ NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13, Correspondence/C. Te Water to J. B. M. Hertzog 10 October 1938; Pirow, *Hertzog*, p.238

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.240

⁸¹ NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13, Correspondence/C. Te Water to J. B. M. Hertzog 13 December 1938, pp.2 - 3

⁸² Pirow, *Hertzog*, p.240

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.242

Mackenzie King had, however, been convinced, even if only temporarily, of the efficacy of Munich, deliberately scaling back on armaments approved during the crisis, when it became clear that war was to be averted after all. The impact of his change in attitude described above can be detected in his reception of the Defence estimates on 14th November, when he approved a doubling of defence expenditure because, as he explained in his diary of that date, 'up to the present we had been keeping up a nominal defence so as to preserve organisation, and to be in a state of semi-preparedness, but in reality our defence was wholly inadequate and ineffective.'⁸⁴ Although he had been Prime Minister since 1935, and previously through most of the 1920s, there is no indication that Mackenzie King in any way considered himself responsible for this remarkable state of affairs, nor to have considered that he, as well as his defence minister should know, as he put it in his journal, 'where the hundred millions appropriated since we came into office had gone.'⁸⁵ His previous incarnation, as the careful keeper of the public purse who denounced the spendthrift forces trying to slip through additional expenditure as an emergency measure (which admittedly would have kept the matter outside Parliamentary scrutiny) was both gone and forgotten.⁸⁶ He now privately viewed increasing the expenditure and pace of re-armament as 'reasonable and almost necessary.'⁸⁷ This was because, he continued, 'we are dealing with gangster nations, especially in the case of Germany and Japan.' Typically, he fretted 'I doubt if Cabinet will so view it.' In this regard, he singled out Dunning and Lapointe as the likely centres of opposition to his stance.

In fact, Lapointe accepted that increased defence expenditure was necessary, but worried how this would play in Quebec, as King reported in his diary for 29 November.⁸⁸ Cabinet itself proved initially reluctant, in the Prime Minister's view, as expressed in his journal, 'to come to full grip with situation [*sic*].'⁸⁹ Mackenzie King felt they were trying to foist full responsibility for the decision onto him, as he complained in his diary, a situation he was temperamentally incapable of accepting, so the discussion was carried over to the following Cabinet, where it took up most of the day, but still without reaching a final decision.⁹⁰ His diary indicates that consensus was finally reached on 16 December, with the proposed doubling of expenditure cut back to \$54 million, with an additional \$6 million assigned to

⁸⁴ King, *Diary*, 14 November 1938

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2 December 1938

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7 October 1938

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 14 November 1938

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 29 November 1938

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 December 1938

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7 December 1938

train pilots.⁹¹ Emphasis was to be placed on naval and air expenditure rather than the militia, as it was felt that this was where Canada was most vulnerable and could do most to protect itself. Cabinet was unanimous on the danger presented by the current world situation and the Prime Minister noted that even the 'Quebec members felt that considerable increase in estimates were necessary and would be approved.' Mackenzie King was absolutely clear about the centrality of *Kristallnacht* to this changed perception, having previously noted on 14 November 1938: 'the treatment of the Jews by the Germans discloses how quickly feeling may come to the point where war against these forces will be irresistible.'⁹²

Overview

Unlike London, *Kristallnacht* seems to have had only a limited impact on perceptions of Germany in Canberra, Pretoria and Wellington. New Zealand was simply confirmed in its distaste for the Nazi regime; as previously seen, Hitler had never been popular there and the pogrom certainly provided no reason to revise this opinion.⁹³ Australia likewise disliked *Kristallnacht*, but only cautiously, to paper over the divisions within its ruling elite. Lyons might have abhorred the persecution of the Jews before the pogrom, but this was no reason to abandon his pacifism and endorse Billy Hughes's bellicosity afterwards. South Africa was likewise forthright in its condemnation, but only initially, before reverting to the position that Germany was a necessary, even if not ideal, partner in resolving the European situation. Only Ottawa appears to have changed its perception of Berlin as a result of this episode, coming to regard Germany as a threat which would have to be addressed.

Condemnation did not however translate into practical support for the new wave of refugees created by the persecution. The dominions outdid each other in efforts to avoid accepting any responsibility for attempting to resolve the issue. New Zealand refused to disclose its immigration policy, insisting each case would be treated on its own merits, apparently terrified lest the 111 people of German origin accepted into the country in the seven years succeeding *Kristallnacht* incite a storm of anti-Semitic protest. Australia likewise only offered to accept 15,000 refugees over the next 3 years in an attempt to forestall any pressure for a more generous policy. Pirow proved as generous with other people's land over the Jewish question as the Colonial one, but when it came to South African territory, even the

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 16 December 1938

⁹² *Ibid.*, 14 November 1938

⁹³ See Chapter One, above.

'Zionist' Smuts made clear that further Jewish immigration would not be accepted. Only in Canada did Mackenzie King attempt to do something constructive for the Jews, and he was overcome by the pragmatic opposition of his Cabinet, as well as his own natural inertia.

Kristallnacht was not without its effects, however. As has already been seen, it revolutionised Ottawa's view of Germany, leading directly to a reappraisal of Canada's defence and a consequent commitment to renewed rearmament. The pogrom also injected fresh vigour into Savage's proposal for a Pacific Defence Conference, but probably more for its perceived effect on London, rather than its actual impact in Canberra and Wellington. South African defence preparations likewise continued unabated and Pirow returned to South Africa apparently convinced that war was more likely than ever in the wake of his failed European tour, with all the consequences this was likely to have for the Union's domestic harmony.

The pogrom was therefore significant in its impact on the dominions. It may only have changed perceptions of Germany in Canada, but it briefly united the dominions in condemnation of its barbarity. This condemnation did not translate into anything much more practical for the newly created wave of refugees than expressions of sympathy, but it created a consensus that war was more, rather than less, likely. This development sparked unique reactions in each dominion, based on their own perceptions of their situation. Canada therefore suddenly turned to rearmament. New Zealand, while continuing its own preparations, took the opportunity to revive Savage's idea of a Pacific Defence Conference. Australian resistance to the idea proved to have reduced to the level where it had become acceptable, provided it could be confined to purely military matters to avoid antagonising the United States and Japan. South Africa likewise continued its defence preparations in the shadow of the Neutrality Pact. *Kristallnacht* confirmed the pre-existing trend for the dominions to regard war as increasingly probable in the wake of Munich, this time embracing even Canada.

4: AN UNHAPPY NEW YEAR:

THE DOMINIONS, HITLER'S 30TH JANUARY SPEECH AND INTERNATIONAL TENSION

Someone (it is generally thought Colonel Hans Oster) apparently inspired a co-ordinated series of leaks to British representatives through the period December 1938 to January 1939.¹ These suggested that Hitler was about to move West, perhaps with a surprise air attack on London, or a sudden descent on the Netherlands, possibly as early as the end of February.² The panic that this induced in Whitehall does not seem to have engulfed Halifax, Chamberlain or the rest of the Cabinet, even if it did cause them to revise British war plans.³ Any such scepticism was, however, entirely absent from the telegram addressed to the dominion governments by the Dominions Office on the 25th January.⁴ This three page cable did indeed admit that to attribute such aggressive intentions to Hitler might 'seem fanciful and fantastic.' Nevertheless, London countered this view with the observation that there was a remarkable unity to the reports that had been received, which came from diverse sources, whose character and integrity had proved consistently reliable in the past. The missive then went on to describe Hitler's 'mental condition, his insensate rage against Great Britain and his megalomania' as being 'entirely consistent with the execution of a desperate coup against the Western Powers.' Such a coup could serve both as a way out of his domestic economic difficulties and as a distraction for any wavering support among his armed forces. The telegram went on to emphasise that Hitler's annual 30 January speech (to commemorate the anniversary of his assumption of power) was therefore more important than usual, as it appeared he might use the occasion to telegraph his intentions to the German people. The Dominions Office was, however, unable to say in what terms, if at all, Chamberlain would warn the German Chancellor in the speech the British Prime Minister was scheduled to give two days before Hitler's, to deter the latter from taking any irrevocable steps.

Four days after the first cable, on Sunday 29 January, the same day Sir Thomas Inskip replaced Malcolm MacDonald as Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London sent a

¹ Oster was second in command at German Intelligence and a long-term opponent of Hitler, having therefore the means and motive to undertake such a scheme. See for instance, Kershaw, *Nemesis*, p.157, and Watt, *How War Came*, pp.103 - 104

² NASA SAB/BTS/1/4/10/Anglo-German Relations/Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Dominion Prime Ministers, Circular Telegram No.20, 25 January 1939, pp.1 - 3.

³ Watt, *How War Came*, pp.101 - 102

⁴ NASA SAB/BTS/1/4/10/Anglo-German Relations/Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Dominion Prime Ministers, Circular Telegram No.20, 25 January 1939, pp.1 - 3.

supplementary telegram to the dominions.⁵ This cable was short and to the point: His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom had been considering what their position would be in the event of an unprovoked German attack on the Netherlands, as per their previous telegram of 25 January, and they had now come to the provisional conclusion such an attack had to be regarded as a *casus belli* for Britain. London did soften the blow by indicating they were discussing their position with Paris and Brussels and would reconsider the situation in light of these conversations. This message was followed eight days later, on 7 February, by a further communication advising that the previously provisional decision to regard the integrity of the Netherlands as a fundamental British interest could now be regarded as final and that this had been extended to cover Switzerland as well.⁶ Staff talks with the French were furthermore now to be reinvigorated under conditions of the utmost secrecy. The French had also raised the question of Italian aggression, and the British government had since confirmed that talks 'should proceed on the basis of a war against Germany and Italy in combination and should be extended in scope to include all likely fields of operations.' Disappointingly, from London's perspective, Belgium had in the meantime taken the opportunity given to reaffirm its commitment to neutrality, as the only option for maintaining its independence whatever the circumstances. The Dutch had, however, confirmed they would resist any attempt at aggression and expected to be able to hold out for 3 – 4 days, although foreign observers considered a period of less than 24 hours more likely. London did not feel able to comment definitively on this latter point. The Foreign Secretary hoped to hold direct discussions with the Dutch Foreign Minister on 14 February when the latter would be in London for cultural reasons.

To reinforce the seriousness of the situation, a further telegram of the same date reported the substance of a conversation between President Roosevelt and the Dutch Ambassador to Washington which underlined the sense of danger.⁷ There was evidence 'Germany and Italy had signed an offensive and defensive alliance.' It was also believed 'Germany had decided to turn westwards.' It might have been expected the dominions would assume that Roosevelt would have received this information from London and Paris, as well as perhaps independently from the source the latter pair had obtained it from. This was particularly so, as the dominions had already been informed that London had itself shared the contents of the

⁵ NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12/Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London to Minister for External Affairs, Capetown, Circular Telegram No.30, 29 January 1939

⁶ NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12/Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London to Minister for External Affairs, Capetown, Circular Telegram No.41, 7 February 1939, p.1

⁷ NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12/Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London to Minister for External Affairs, Capetown, Circular Telegram No.42, 7 February 1939

original cable of 25 January to them with Washington. Nonetheless, Whitehall duly ratcheted up the sense of tension by relaying without comment the advice that these indications had come from 'three different and reliable sources.' The Senate Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman had further advised the Dutch Minister that, even if any aid to victims was likely to be purely economic in nature, 'public opinion in the United States was coming round to the formal denunciation of aggressors.' It was evident that the Dominions Office did not wish its charges to be lulled into any sense of security, whether false or otherwise. It was not until two days later, on Wednesday 9 February, that London eventually found time to advise the dominions that several European countries, including France and Italy, appeared after all to have found grounds for reassurance in Hitler's speech of the previous week, but qualified this with the caveat: 'it will be realised it is difficult to summarise accurately owing to cross-currents of opinion.'⁸ Britain was therefore not quite ready to let the matter drop, even if supportive evidence was proving rather thin on the ground.

However, the next week, on Thursday 17 February, Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary, was rather more equivocal in a meeting with the dominion High Commissioners in London. On the one hand, he let them know that he had come to believe the danger had either been exaggerated or that the dictators had simply been trying to intimidate the West.⁹ On the other hand, he did not entirely rule out the possibility that an act of aggression might still transpire, as 'he always said to himself that it was necessary to remember that the exact opposite to what he anticipated might happen on the following morning.' As things stood, it was best 'to remain as calm as possible and not allow ourselves be stampeded.' It was not in fact until 8 March, nearly three weeks later, that the Dominions Office finally brought the episode to an official close with Circular Telegram No.86, which informed the dominion governments that 'we are now inclined to think that Hitler has for the time being abandoned the idea of precipitating an immediate crisis such as he seemed to be contemplating at the beginning of the year.'¹⁰ A week later, Hitler was in Prague.

⁸ NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12/Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London to Minister for External Affairs, Capetown, Circular Telegram No.46, 9 February 1939

⁹ Halifax as cited in TNA DO 121/5 Minute of Meeting between Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs and Dominion High Commissioners, 17 February 1939

¹⁰ SAB BTS 1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Dominion Prime Ministers, 8 March 1939

The language employed in the original telegram of 25 January was scarcely calculated to induce calm, and Ottawa's response was certainly anything but. Mackenzie King recorded his reactions to the developing situation in his diary.¹¹ He had already been displaying signs of nervousness there, noting the parallels between contemporary conditions and the climax of the previous crisis in September 1938, with an imminent German test mobilisation, and the return of Dr. Windels, the German Consul, to his homeland.¹² All of which left the Canadian Prime Minister to conclude 'the whole situation looks very ominous.' This was even before he had laid eyes on the Dominions Secretary's initial despatch. His diary reveals his first reaction to that cable was that things were 'extremely serious.'¹³ This anxiety was only reinforced by reports of the fall of Barcelona and the imminent transformation of the Anti-Comintern Pact into a defensive alliance against any power. This all led him to conclude that 'the world has not looked as bad at any time.'

He immediately arranged for the Governor-General (Lord Tweedsmuir; the author, John Buchan) and Ian Mackenzie to be informed of the telegram and called a special meeting of cabinet for 11 a.m. the following morning, without explaining why to avoid the risk of 'talk.' In an about turn from his previous stance Mackenzie King now authorised the Minister of Defence to see if it would after all be possible to obtain the additional planes from the United States which had previously been cancelled in the aftermath of Munich. He then met with the Governor-General, where they agreed that 'the whole conflict was one between forces of good and those of evil.' It was evident that it was the latter of these which now held sway over the mystical Hitler. Mackenzie King considered Canadian participation to be inevitable in the event of war, as 'we were liable to be attacked if Britain was at war.' As he explained in his journal, this was what had led him to echo his mentor, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, in Parliament on 16 January that 'when Britain is at war, Canada is at war, and liable to attack.'¹⁴ In doing this Mackenzie King had been trying to highlight the continuity between his own stance and that of his Francophone predecessor. Unfortunately, his remark also suggested that Canada's position remained essentially what it had been in 1910, despite everything that had occurred in the interim. It also appeared to give the lie to his oft-repeated statement that it would be for Parliament to decide on the question of war and peace, 'in light

¹¹ King, *Diary*, 19 - 27 January 1939

¹² *Ibid.*, 19 January 1939

¹³ *Ibid.*, 26 January 1939

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16 January 1939

of all the circumstances.’ This had proved too much for the Francophone press and the isolationists in the Department of External Affairs who he complained were vigorously critical of his stance.¹⁵ Clearly their criticism had stung the ever-sensitive Prime Minister, who, his diary indicates, thereupon proceeded to depict himself self-pityingly to Tweedsmuir as a lonely, isolated figure without whom the whole edifice would undoubtedly come crashing down.¹⁶ He bitterly denounced what he portrayed as the unrealistically theoretical posturing of his critics, contrasting this with what he saw as his own realism in believing in Canada’s vulnerability in the event of war. He clearly felt the cable from London vindicated his stance by confirming his pessimism about the international situation.

In the following day’s entry, he recounted how he presented the news from London to his cabinet.¹⁷ Mackenzie King convinced himself that ministers were ‘deeply impressed by all that it conveyed.’ He then returned to his recent repetition of Sir Wilfrid Laurier’s remark. He proceeded to qualify this by reaffirming that ‘our participation or neutrality would depend on what Parliament decided.’ He reminded his colleagues that he had brought this up at cabinet previously and had ‘thought we were all agreed. That I had gathered, at the time, that such was the case.’ This seemed to be rather at variance with the recollection of his *Quebecois* ally Lapointe, but Mackenzie King offered the compromise that the former had perhaps not realised the significance of what his chief had intended to say. The Prime Minister then went on to elaborate his position. The first part of the remark was simply ‘a statement of fact.’ If war broke out, did anyone imagine ‘our shipping would not immediately be attacked, that every effort would be made to stop vessels carrying grain, munitions or anything else from Canada, and that, if possible, our harbours might not be attacked.’ To his evident satisfaction, ‘all present agreed to that.’ He then went on to explain that, subject to this, it would still be for Parliament to decide the extent of Canadian participation or otherwise in such a conflict, ‘in light of all the circumstances.’ At the current time, these circumstances included ‘the threat to freedom the world over which we could not possibly hope to escape, did they make any headway in Europe, whatever views we might hold of obligations arising out of imperial connections.’ The Prime Minister feared that if they did not correct the false impression that neutrality remained a viable option under contemporary conditions, the party could ‘be crushed in the face of what might happen within the next four weeks.’

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 19 & 20 January 39

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 26 January 1939

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 27 January 1939

Such a view was anathema to Lapointe. Ever anxious about the *Quebecois* electorate, he had witnessed how poorly Mackenzie King's words had played in the Francophone press, leading him to try to prevent the Prime Minister from going any further than he already had, as he would explain to Dr. Skelton the following week.¹⁸ Careful to choose his battles, however, Lapointe did not confront his leader directly. Instead, as Mackenzie King noted in his diary that evening, and echoing his stance the previous September, the Minister of Justice argued that there was no need to make a statement of policy immediately.¹⁹ The Prime Minister at once agreed to this, but nevertheless countered that now was the time to decide what was necessary, while everyone was still calm. Lapointe, however, continued to argue in favour of deferring a decision as long as possible, whereupon Mackenzie King embarked on a piece of emotional blackmail, referring openly to his illness during the previous crisis, and explicitly warning that he might not be available to lead them during another one. This was of course vital for Lapointe, who was as dependent on Mackenzie King for exercising Quebec's influence at the heart of government, as Mackenzie King was on Lapointe to deliver Quebec's support. The latter hastily agreed that Canada would naturally have to enter any war such as cabinet was currently contemplating. Dunning, the Treasurer, concurred, predicting that a wave of emotion would sweep Canada into the war in spite of all 'theories, doctrines and statements.'

Lapointe, having recovered his balance, was not now above a bit of emotional blackmail of his own, wondering aloud if 'it might be necessary for some of them to consider whether they could do better in the way of steadying people in their own parts, by being out of the Cabinet, rather than in it.' Mackenzie King swiftly countered that they should all work together within cabinet, building a consensus, as otherwise there would be inexorable pressure for a National Government, which 'might lead to anything, conscription and all the rest.' He noted with satisfaction that that 'seemed to make an impression.' At this point Gardiner, the Minister for Agriculture, helpfully interjected that he had it on good authority that plans were already afoot to bring a coalition about. The Prime Minister confided in his cabinet that he believed his entire staff were against him and regarded his recent reference to Sir Wilfrid Laurier as 'appalling.' He was therefore deeply pessimistic as to what help he could look for from there in defining the government's position. He was dismissive of 'the

¹⁸ These were the words he would use the following week to ask Dr. Skelton, the permanent head of the Department for External Affairs, to use his influence to try to push the Prime Minister back into a neutral stance, see LAC *Skelton Papers*, Skelton, O.D., *Diary*, 2 February 1939

¹⁹ King, *Diary*, 27 January 1939; for Lapointe's position in September, see Chapter One, above.

intelligentsia.' His duty 'was to tell Canada of her dangers. Not of theories that could not save the lives of the people.'

Cabinet therefore sought to find a way to define the government position itself. Surprisingly, Lapointe favoured using the argument of the indivisibility of the Crown as 'that meant the loyalty of all to the Crown, and that French Canadians would be more ready to fight for the Crown for that reason.' In reality he was clutching at straws, trying to find a more palatable formula than 'when England is at war, Canada is at war', which was playing so badly among his fellow *Quebecois*. Mackenzie King attempted to clear matters up but only succeeded in muddying the waters still further by declaring

the only way was to make clear, as I had said before, while we had worked out our equality of status with regard to internal affairs, we had not yet come to the point where, in international relations, we were able to state the theoretical position which had been the one which had been achieved in practice.

Even if they failed to come up with a satisfactory formula, the Prime Minister was relieved that there had been no acrimony and that cabinet was united on participating in the event of war. This was in fact far from true. Lapointe remained hostile, telling Dr. Skelton, the permanent head of the Department of External Affairs, the following week he 'thought the P.M. was fooling himself if he thought he and Canada agreed.'²⁰

As cabinet could not come up with an acceptable statement of the government position, Mackenzie King was left with no alternative but to turn to the experts in the Department of External Affairs after all. He met with Skelton after cabinet had risen. It was clearly not a meeting he was looking forward to, introducing his account of the occasion in his diary, with the words: 'it was the first I have spoken to S. of my speech knowing what his attitude would be.'²¹ He evidently expected a confrontation, but his advisor, like Lapointe, knew his chief too well to meet him head-on. Skelton allowed Mackenzie King to finish uninterrupted a long exposition of what had just transpired in cabinet and 'what was a statement of fact in the face of a reality and what was policy.' The doctor did not attack this stance overtly, but instead sought to undermine it indirectly by suggesting: that it was inconsistent with the Prime Minister's previous remarks; that he should emulate his predecessor by steering a middle course between nationalism and imperialism; that there was no need to rush into a decision; that the younger generation felt no bond with Britain; and that Ireland and South

²⁰ LAC Skelton Papers, Skelton, O.D., *Diary*, Entry 2 February 1939

²¹ King, *Diary*, 27 January 1939.

Africa were distancing themselves from London. Mackenzie King was having none of it. His current remarks addressed Canada's strategic reality not her theoretical constitutional position as his previous remarks had done. He was steering a middle course by addressing both issues rather than solely focusing on one to the exclusion of the other. The electorate would never forgive the Party if he did not clarify the position in advance of an actual crisis. He sympathised with the youth of Canada and would make clear the country was not automatically tied to Britain. The Irish and South African cases lacked relevance because each country had to decide for itself, based on its own conditions. The Prime Minister then took the opportunity to instruct his Permanent Secretary to devise 'a formula which would express exactly what we have in mind.' The Permanent Secretary later conceded defeat on this issue, but remained privately committed to trying to wean his chief away from this stance.²² Looking back on the day, Mackenzie King congratulated himself in his diary for the strength of character he considered he had displayed in adopting such firm stances on what he saw as the real and theoretical aspects of external affairs.²³

Doubts about the actual gravity of the situation began to emerge early for Mackenzie King, however; even before Hitler spoke. Up to the 27th, he had depicted the situation in his diary as being variously 'alarming', 'very ominous', 'extremely serious', and 'perfectly appalling.'²⁴ The entry for the next day indicates the Prime Minister's view was changing.²⁵ Meeting with Sir Gerald Campbell, the British High Commissioner in Ottawa, the next day, the Canadian Prime Minister noted how worried the British representative seemed about international relations generally and the prospects of a sudden attack on Britain in particular. Mackenzie King had indeed himself expressed similar sentiments in cabinet just the previous day. Nonetheless, some strands of optimism, at least with regard to the British situation, began to emerge in the Prime Minister's thinking, although still qualified by a general pessimism. It now seemed impossible to him that Hitler would launch a surprise attack on Britain, although he did not rule out the idea that war itself might still be imminent. Later the same day, listening admiringly to Chamberlain's speech in Birmingham, he acknowledged the situation to be 'appallingly critical.' Even still, he could not bring himself 'to believe that war will come between Germany and England.' By Sunday, his diary revealed this had become 'a strong conviction.'²⁶ He resolved to write to Hitler, believing that the power of

²² LAC Skelton Papers, Skelton, O.D., *Diary*, Entry 2 February 1939

²³ King, *Diary*, 27 January 1939

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17 January 1939, 19 January 1939, 26 January 1939, & 27 January 1939

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28 January 1939

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 29 January 1939

God's love would prevent war 'at least with England.' He went on to describe a great feeling of calm descending on him, despite the sense of crisis and saw in his amicable social relations with the German Consul in Ottawa, 'a sort of symbol of the powers exerting themselves in the beyond.'

The next day, anxiety reared its head again before Hitler spoke. Mackenzie King wrote in his diary of seeing 'subterfuge' in Japan's apparent refusal to sign a military agreement with Germany and Italy.²⁷ His account continued how, after a meeting between the Cabinet Sub-Committee on defence and the heads of the armed forces, he came away positive 'that we are hopelessly inadequate in each of the branches because of essentials.' This led him to even consider talking with Manion, the Leader of the Opposition, about placing orders for armaments before the appropriations for these had passed through Parliament. Hitler's speech, however, soothed the tensions which had been mounting through the day. His diary recorded that the Prime Minister did not listen to this in full, instead deciding to rest before going to the House, having heard the opening part. He was relieved to note that it seemed moderate in tone and considered Hitler sounded older and much less excitable. His early optimistic reaction was bolstered by reports he received later in the day emphasising the mildness of Hitler's speech, particularly in relation to what had been expected. He discounted the support Hitler had given Italy, considering it to be no more than the counterpart to what Britain was providing France with. The effect of all this was to seriously undermine the credibility of Whitehall as far as the Canadian Prime Minister was concerned. Their concern that Hitler would go to extremes in his speech had proved to be 'mistaken.' Other elements of their despatch had been 'unduly alarming.' The new despatch of the same date, confirming that Britain would regard any violation of Dutch neutrality as a *casus belli*, consequently did not concern Mackenzie King much, leading him to dismiss it in his diary with: 'I simply cannot believe Germany has any such intention.' He went on to describe meeting Lapointe later, when the pair agreed that there would be no war, although Mackenzie King continued to fear 'a year of frightful uncertainty.'

The following day, the Prime Minister met with Dr. Windels, the German Consul, recording the substance of their talk in his diary.²⁸ When Mackenzie King expressed his intention of writing Hitler a personal letter, the latter naturally enthused, saying 'it might do great good.' The Canadian leader also took the opportunity to warn the German representative that if

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 30 January 1939

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31 January 1939

Britain were attacked, Canada would inevitably enter such a war at her side. Windels did not have to comment on this, so it is perhaps surprising he concurred. Even more surprisingly, when Mackenzie King commented he believed the United States would do the same, the German Consul not only agreed, but confided that this was also the opinion of the German Ambassador in Washington. The Canadian Prime Minister was undoubtedly deeply flattered by these confidences, but even more so by the enthusiasm Windels demonstrated for Mackenzie King's idea of sending Hitler a personal letter. Canada's leader had now become even more sceptical about the British Foreign Office. Not only had they allowed themselves to become overly concerned by the situation, they had been shown up by Hitler, who Mackenzie King described in his diary as referring to 'attacking Holland being next to seizing the Moon.' This convinced Mackenzie King that the German leader was much better versed than Whitehall in what was going on and much more adept at using this to his advantage. The Canadian Prime Minister did, however, record some slight concern about the Mediterranean, but was relieved to note that Chamberlain had swiftly responded to Hitler's speech by declaring that Britain was prepared to 'help in appeasement where others are ready to join in disarmament.' The next day, 1 February 1939, he described in his diary how sending his letter to Hitler filled him with great expectations as to the impact it might have.²⁹

He remained concerned about the international situation, however. Despite his doubts about the Foreign Office, when London's cable, describing the ever closer arrangements they were contemplating with the French, arrived the following week, still inspired the diary entry that things were 'very serious.'³⁰ Nonetheless, in contrast to the near panic he had displayed during the final week of January, he went on to describe the most significant aspect of this development as being the parallel between the co-operation between Britain and France on one side of the Atlantic, and Quebec and Ontario on the other. In January, the Prime Minister had been too worried about the imminent prospect of war to involve himself in such digressions. At the end of the month, his diary for 28 February indicates how his new found scepticism played its part in his decision to let Lapointe veto Canadian support for British repudiation of 'the General Act and Optional Clause', an arbitration process which might prove embarrassing in imposing a blockade in the event of war.³¹ The entry continues by describing how the Prime Minister found his doubts about the Foreign Office reinforced by Lascelles, the King's secretary, but could not quite bring himself to believe the latter's explanation that it was all about manipulating stock market movements to obtain foreign

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1 February 1939

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9 February 1939

³¹ *Ibid.*, 28 February 1939

exchange for Germany. By now far from convinced that war was inevitable, Mackenzie King nonetheless recorded in his journal on 2 March his belief that if it came, it would do so during 1939.³² This led him to decide not to place orders for planes in the United States, as these could not be ready in time for such a war; instead taking the more politically palatable course of ordering them from Canadian firms, although this would be more costly and take longer. When London finally indicated that it no longer appeared likely Hitler would move west, the Prime Minister described himself in his diary as being relieved to report this to cabinet, but he also noted he took the opportunity to stand by everything he had previously said.³³

Clearly this qualification referred to his reiteration of Laurier's remark that when England was at war, Canada was at war. This more bellicose stance can be traced back to *Kristallnacht* rather than the January cables from London, as he had already taken the first steps towards Canadian rearmament.³⁴ He had also independently become distinctly pessimistic about the international outlook by the time the telegrams arrived. These latter had not only provided him with corroboration for his forebodings, but appear to have pushed him into a state of near panic; leading to urgent discussions with the Minister of Defence and the Governor-General, followed by an emergency cabinet meeting the next day, all of which generated more heat than light. This initial sense of alarm quickly subsided, though, to be replaced by a growing sense of scepticism towards London. In this, he was encouraged by both Lapointe and Skelton, who were both, for their own different reasons, anxious to turn the Prime Minister from the course he had embarked on. This endeavour was successful with regard to the relatively minor affair of the General Act and Optional Clause, where doubts about the Foreign Office's judgement played a part in Mackenzie King's decision to let Lapointe have his way. The Prime Minister's deep-rooted belief that he could transform the situation through personal intervention, because of the connection he believed he had established with Hitler on his visit to Germany, also resurfaced. This had lain dormant since *Kristallnacht* had led him to view the Nazi regime through less rose-tinted spectacles, but now re-emerged with his decision to contact Hitler directly in order to soothe international tensions. There were limits to the flexibility the Prime Minister was prepared to display, however. He remained intransigent in defence of his earlier reprise of Laurier's remark, whether addressing the relatively sympathetic Governor-General, his divided cabinet colleagues and party caucus, or his distinctly hostile professional advisors, in spite of all the

³² *Ibid.*, 2 March 1939

³³ *Ibid.*, 7 March 1939

³⁴ See previous chapter.

efforts of those who opposed this line to have him moderate his position. To this extent his words had trapped him and because it was his own personal status as leader that was at stake, his reduced confidence in London's competence had no impact on his resolution on the matter.

South African divisions deepen

Dr. Gie had clearly not been subjected to the influences which had inspired the British 'war scare' cable of 25 January. On the 16th, he had produced a resolutely cheerful forecast for Pretoria on the outlook for Europe for the rest of the year: Russian isolation meant Germany could proceed less aggressively in Eastern Europe; fears of German action against the Ukraine had subsided; German-Polish talks appeared to have gone well; Memel might revert to Germany, but there would be no crisis over this; the Germans were bound to be pleased that Chamberlain was continuing to play a central part in bringing about appeasement between the Axis and the western powers through his visit to Italy; and Germany was exercising great restraint in its support of Italy in its resistance to France.³⁵ Gie conceded the increased pace of German armaments was concerning, but, not as alarming as the pace the rest of the world was rearming at and, besides, any increased risk could be more than offset by the continued diplomatic resolution of problems. Gie was clearly taken aback by the dismissal of Dr. Schacht as President of the *Reichsbank* on 19 January, but apart from expressing concern at the direction financial policy might take in respect of armaments and that this probably heralded the return of Dr. Goebbels to prominence, he did not take the opportunity to revise his forecasts for a quiet 1939 in his 23 January report on the episode for Pretoria.³⁶ There was nothing here to challenge his Prime Minister's preconceptions that Germany continued to be a country Britain could and should be prepared to conciliate.

Like Mackenzie King in Canada, General Smuts was clearly worried by developments even before seeing the telegram from London. Pirow, the South African Minister of Defence, later expressed the view in *Hertzog* that Smuts then believed that war was inevitable.³⁷ Smuts's letters to his friends, the Gilletts, do not in fact indicate this, but nevertheless display some anxiety as to what the future held, for instance writing on 26 January that: 'a period of grave

³⁵ NASA SAB BTS/1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Gie to Hertzog, 16 January 1939

³⁶ NASA SAB GG/1082/22/203/Diplomatic Matters - General - Germany, Gie to Hertzog, 23 January 1939

³⁷ Pirow, *Hertzog*, p.242

tension may therefore lie ahead of us.’³⁸ In the same letter, he placed greater emphasis than Gie on the dismissal of Dr. Schacht as a blow for moderate influence in the Nazi regime, considering that it could only herald greater activity on Hitler’s part, where Gie had left the issue open. He continued that Ribbentrop’s Polish visit, and the despatch of a mission to open trade negotiations in Moscow, were not evidence of a calmer atmosphere, but rather attempts to clear the decks in Eastern Europe, ahead of an Axis initiative on the colonial question or in the Mediterranean area, which Gie had not addressed. The General’s described his greatest concern, however, as being Spain, although he did not entirely rule out Hitler precipitating another crisis elsewhere beforehand. The end of the Civil War was at hand and then ‘the fat will be in the fire.’ The French and British would demand the withdrawal of Italian troops from Spain and Smuts believed Mussolini had no intention of complying. This would then prove ‘the real test of Chamberlain’s policy.’ A test, however, meant that it might still succeed, so even though Smuts was clearly deeply pessimistic, he had equally evidently not come to the point where he saw war as inevitable.

Also pessimistic was Charles Te Water. On 29 January, as London cabled Pretoria advising a German attack on the Netherlands would mean war, he produced a report that was significantly more negative than Gie’s, as ‘observation of the obscure but consistent deterioration in Anglo-German relations has led me to the contrary conclusion.’³⁹ Te Water therefore viewed the previous Dominions Office missive of 25 January with no very great surprise. He was, however, careful to recount the rather more reassuring news (from General Hertzog’s perspective) that Halifax had let slip that German domestic difficulties might just as easily prevent as encourage another adventure on Hitler’s part. Nonetheless, Te Water did not himself share this more comfortable view. He had been reluctant previously to impart his views to the General but ‘while these [the direction of events] still remain incalculable, to continue to take refuge in wishful thinking as an alternative method of reason and deduction seems to be to me sheer cowardice.’ The pace of the arms race represented a ‘creeping paralysis.’ This and every less sure test indicated that Europe was ‘entering upon the last phase.’ All of which was in sharp contrast to Gie, who had argued that the arms race, while a disturbing element, was containable and that all other factors militated for a more peaceful prospect.⁴⁰

³⁸ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol.246/Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 26 January 1939

³⁹ NASA SAB BTS/1/4/10/Anglo-German Relations, Te Water to Hertzog, 29 January 1939

⁴⁰ See above, and originally, NASA SAB BTS/1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Gie to Hertzog, 16 January 1939

The same day Smuts wrote again to the Gilletts and by then had clearly seen at least the first Dominions Office telegram, as he explained, 'shortly after writing this [his previous letter] the cables began to warn us of trouble coming in Europe.'⁴¹ Unlike Te Water, he considered Chamberlain's speech had shown greater firmness than heretofore and 'Hitler is expected to explode a new bombshell tomorrow etc. etc.' All this led Smuts to believe that 'we may be on the eve of a crisis even worse than last Sep.' Returning to his concern that this would be in the Mediterranean, he emphasised the latter's importance to the Commonwealth, compared with Eastern Europe, and its proximity to United States' interests in the Atlantic 'which is their English Channel.' This led him to believe 'the dangers of a general conflagration are therefore much greater.' He thought it 'madness' that Hitler and Mussolini would stake all on such a gamble 'but there has been madness before and we are not immune.' His greatest fear, however, was that the ratcheting up of international tension was actually just a ruse, because he believed this could not succeed again 'and it is more likely to create a situation from which honourable retreat is impossible.' All this was, nevertheless, still some way short of saying war had become inevitable.

The next day, 30 January, Dr. Gie sent Hertzog a briefing in advance of Hitler's speech the same day.⁴² He made no reference to the cables from London and there is no reason to believe they had been shown to him. Overall, he continued to display an optimistic view on the prospects for 1939 in his report. Unlike Smuts, he was not greatly distressed by the dismissal of Schacht, as it simply showed 'one should continue to expect the unexpected.' This was no reason for pessimism, as 'forecasts, whether they are gloomy or optimistic, should be based on surer foundations than that.' Gie refused to be negative. There were indeed 'signs and rumours, more rumours than signs, which might be interpreted as pointing to disturbing developments in 1939.' Economically and financially, however, he still did not have 'tragic expectations for 1939.' He conceded that Hitler 'would continue his "strong policies".' These were simply inherent in the Nazi regime. Gie did not address this further, implying that this was something that simply had to be accepted. It was also clear that any brakes Schacht had managed to apply to the colossal state expenditure particularly on armaments, had been removed, which 'might be interpreted as indications the regime is preparing to make or meet trouble in the international field at an early date.' However, Gie was also keen to reiterate that 'Germany's acceleration in armaments production was only a part of the universal armaments race.' It therefore could not be taken as definitive proof that

⁴¹ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol.246/Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 29 January 1939

⁴² NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Gie to Hertzog, 30 January 1939

Hitler was necessarily preparing for another crisis in 1939. Gie was also dismissive of rumours of an imminent mobilisation as this had been denied and the consensus was that this denial was trustworthy. There were indeed dangers inherent in the situation, 'but given time they may be overcome by wise statesmanship, which fortunately remains active.' Alarming rumours could not be trusted as these often vanished quickly, as the recent ones concerning Eastern Europe had done. Gie believed that the key in this case had been the improvements he saw in the German-Polish relationship, judging from the visit of Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, to Berchtesgaden and Ribbentrop's swift counter visit to Warsaw. Superficially he shared Smuts's concern about the Mediterranean, but he had heard from Coulondre, the French Ambassador, that the *Führer* was urging restraint on his Axis partner, and that this information had been obtained 'on the best authority.' Hitler would undoubtedly attack Roosevelt, but this was only to be expected given the latter's interference in European matters to improve his domestic electoral chances. Gie therefore felt 'still prepared to stand by the optimistic expectations for 1939, which I expressed in my first despatch of the New Year.'

Three days later, Gie reported on the actual contents of Hitler's 30 January speech, noting that in a few instances these had departed from what had originally been expected.⁴³ Hitler had not mentioned Roosevelt and had been extraordinarily moderate in his comments on the United States, in spite of what Gie saw as the President's exploitation of the Jewish question. On this, Gie admitted: '*dis 'n verskriklike gedagte, maar dit moet as moontlik beskou word, dat die Jode in Duitsland uitgemoor sal word, as 'n oorlog hier uitbreek*' [it is a terrible thought, but it must be regarded as possible, that the Jews in Germany will be massacred if a war breaks out here]. Hitler's declaration of unconditional support for Mussolini had also been surprising, but the South African sought to explain away the disturbing aspects of this development, relying on the assurances Coulondre had received, that, whatever Hitler might state in public, he was working assiduously to reduce tensions behind the scenes. In any case, Gie found it hard to believe that Mussolini was really prepared to confront British and French forces, so Hitler's undertaking was perfectly compatible with his declaration that he believed in a long peace. The minister again saw no reason in Hitler's speech to change his earlier predictions for a quiet 1939.

In the longer term, the doctor felt less optimistic, as it was now apparent that Germany and Italy '*in 'n oorlog skouer-aan-skouer sal veg, en ons moet aanneem, (1) dat hierdie enge*

⁴³ NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12, German Foreign Policy, Gie to Hertzog, 2 February 1939

verbond geruime tyd sal duur, en (2) dat dit potensiëel aggressief is [would enter a war shoulder to shoulder, and we must assume that (1) this covenant will last some time, and (2) that it is potentially aggressive]. However, he reassured his government that Hitler's only remaining claim on Britain and France was for the return of colonies, which was not considered grounds for war. Pretoria could therefore apparently continue to enjoy its mandate in South-West Africa without concern that this might be taken from it without its consent. Nonetheless, the pledge to Mussolini did seem to imply a change in Germany's position. If, for instance, Mussolini were to demand Tunis from France and France resolved to go to war to prevent this, then Germany now would be drawn in. Also, if the German-Italian *bloc* meant a redistribution of territories by their claim for a redistribution of goods, then a war in the longer term was inevitable.

Still, Gie saw no reason to concern himself now with such a grim prospect as Hitler's speech would undoubtedly inspire efforts to resolve the underlying issues. The main practical part of the speech was a long exposition of the German economic situation and what it was tied to. Gie undertook to analyse this in greater depth in his next report, and confined himself for the moment to saying that the English response to that explanation seemed favourable and the Germans were very appreciative of this. Funk, the Minister of Economics (and now President of the *Reichsbank*), had personally reassured the South African that steps were already in hand for serious Anglo-German negotiations to commence imminently. The Union could therefore hope that the discussions would lead to positive economic results, which would in themselves be very valuable, but could also lead to even greater benefits, such as arms limitation, and hence create a favourable atmosphere for political negotiations. Gie's account of the speech, like his earlier reports, was again unlikely to contain anything disturbing to Hertzog. Hitler's aggressive support of Mussolini could be offset by the presumption that he was working in the background to reduce tension. The colonial question would never be grounds for war, so the Union could continue to enjoy its mandate in South-West Africa in security. The German-Italian *bloc* might appear aggressive, but this very aggression would invite efforts to resolve the underlying problems. Germany's economic difficulties were to be addressed through negotiations with Britain, thereby easing international tension further. This gloss suggested the prospects for peace, and therefore South African domestic unity, were far from hopeless.

Smuts took a less favourable view of the position than Gie. Writing to the Gilletts the day after Gie's report, he admitted that the speech had been more moderate than expected and

that Hitler had failed to deliver his much anticipated 'bombshell.'⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he saw areas of immediate concern in what had been said. Mindful of South West Africa, he felt Hitler's insistence on the return of the former German colonies outwith the terms of a general settlement of outstanding grievances 'should fill us with alarm.' Unlike Gie, he clearly took no comfort in the *Führer's* caveat that this would never be a cause for war, as this did not even merit a mention. However, he regarded the promise of support for Mussolini against France as being 'the most ominous point in his speech.' Smuts remained convinced that the end of the Spanish Civil War was likely to trigger an international crisis, through Mussolini's expected refusal to then withdraw Italian forces from Spain. Consequently Hitler's declaration of support for Italy would commit Germany to joining in a confrontation with the West, leading the South African to conclude 'it looks as if these two dictators think the time is ripe to pick a quarrel.'

Smuts's greater pessimism can be inferred from his changed attitude to the Munich Settlement. Only the previous week he had dismissed the Czech crisis in his letter to the Gilletts, as something in which 'the British Commonwealth did not feel itself very directly concerned.'⁴⁵ He had indeed previously expressed some reservations about the agreement in this private correspondence, such as his 10 October 1938 comment that 'the lion has tasted blood and his appetite may continue.'⁴⁶ However, he had balanced these concerns with the view that war had not been justified over the issue, writing the next day that it was 'a price the world ought not to be called upon to pay.'⁴⁷ Now, in February 1939, he described to his friends that Munich was both a 'defeat' and a 'capitulation.'⁴⁸ This appeared to move beyond a recognition that the lion's appetite might indeed be continuing. He had identified that possibility at the time of Munich, and had not then considered such an eventuality would fatally undermine the settlement. Whereas previously he had been a cautious supporter of Munich, with some reservations about its consequences, he now appeared to view it in entirely condemnatory terms, and if he continued to see any redeeming features in the settlement, he did not give expression to them. In a supplementary letter to Arthur Gillett on 11 February, he restated his continuing concerns about the international situation, noting that while the publicly available news did not appear particularly disturbing, 'the fuller cable

⁴⁴ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246/Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 3 February 1939

⁴⁵ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246/Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 29 January 1939

⁴⁶ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 243/Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 10 October 1938

⁴⁷ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 243/Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 11 October 1938

⁴⁸ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246/Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 3 February 1939

news which reached us was very alarming.⁴⁹ Smuts now considered peace could only be preserved if 'we once more surrender to force.' This only reinforced his pessimism as 'I doubt whether the democracies will do that again.' Whereas the previous autumn, even after Godesberg, but before Munich, he had written to Arthur that 'these are anxious times but we need not yet despair of peace.'⁵⁰ Clearly, he continued to be far more concerned than he had been the previous autumn.

On 14 February Te Water returned to the subject in a letter to General Hertzog.⁵¹ He observed that much of the contents of the Dominions' Office telegrams of 25 and 29 January, had been contradicted by subsequent information received from the London government. He worried that 'the Chamberlain policy, so lately accused by its critics of isolationism, has been moving to "the left" with a rapidity which must be alarming to those who, like the Dominions [*sic*], have long desired Great Britain to be free of embarrassing continental commitments.' He considered that the extension of British commitments to Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland, together with the extended scope of the staff talks with France would naturally have implications for his government. He thought the Canadians were also disturbed 'at the rapid increase in power and prestige of the Vansittart school of thought in the Foreign Office.' He could not reconcile the Dominions Office cables with Chamberlain's response to Hitler's speech and was unsure which represented the true voice of London. Overall, Te Water considered that while the situation seemed to be superficially improving, what could be glimpsed beneath the surface 'is not and cannot be reassuring.' He remained convinced the only reliable test of international tension continued to be the armaments race, when it slowed things would improve, and not before. On 17 February, however, he was able to inform Hertzog that Halifax now appeared more relaxed about the issue but that London had informed Berlin that there could be no discussion of the colonial issue in the present climate.⁵²

Smuts was still clearly deeply concerned when he returned to the topic of international relations in a letter to Margaret Gillett on the next day.⁵³ He feared from the news he

⁴⁹ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246/Correspondence, Smuts to Arthur Gillett, 11 February 1939. 'The fuller cable news' referred to was the Dominions Office Telegram of 7 February, which had advised the British & French were holding extended staff talks directed against Germany and Italy in combination, and that London had decided that the integrity of Switzerland as well as the Netherlands would now constitute a *casus belli*.

⁵⁰ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 243/Correspondence, Smuts to Arthur Gillett, 26 September 1938

⁵¹ NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78) Vol. 13/Correspondence, Te Water to Hertzog, 14 February 1939

⁵² NASA SAB BTS 1/4/10, Te Water to Hertzog, 17 February 1939

⁵³ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246/Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 18 February 1939

received in the cables 'that Italy is really backing out of her undertaking to evacuate [Spain] (as I had predicted).' Then, Smuts reiterated, 'the fat would be in the fire.' By 25 February he was writing to her that he had observed 'the swing toward France has intensified.'⁵⁴ This was evident from 'recent speeches by high quarters.' Smuts therefore concluded 'that Chamberlain realises the true state of affairs.' The South African Deputy Prime Minister clearly no longer had any faith in 'the spirit of Munich': 'peace pacts look funny in the atmosphere of present happenings both on the continent and in England.' His mood had not improved by 5 March when, again writing to Margaret, having touched on Franco's victory and the Grand Mufti's campaign in Palestine, he rhetorically demanded 'when will the rot be stopped?'⁵⁵ On 10 March, despite London's intimation that the worst now appeared to be over, in a letter to Arthur, he condemned the temptation of pacifism: predicting that 'if we do not go all out – by political action and if needs be by fighting for our democratic principles, the totalitarians are certain to win and reduce our civilisation to a confirmed servitude.'⁵⁶ He continued to be convinced that 'Nazism is a form of what is called Anti-Christ.' Naturally, he was 'prepared to fight against that.' He now dismissed Munich 'as a truce – and a very poor one at that.' He pointed to the armaments race and asked 'what does it mean if not business, or a bluff which may very likely lead to business?' The same day, to Margaret Gillett, he noted that the cables now 'on the whole are optimistic, but I remain pessimistic.'⁵⁷

In this context, the cable most particularly referred to was that of 8 March, in which the Dominions' Office finally grudgingly conceded that Hitler either never had planned to launch a sudden spring offensive against the West, or at least no longer intended doing so. Te Water's analysis of this, in a letter to Hertzog on 7 March, was that this view 'in so far as it reflects a present state of relieved tension is in my opinion a just estimate.'⁵⁸ He believed, however, that the British government was not at this point looking ahead more than a few months at a time and remained distinctly cautious about future developments. His Prime Minister had hitherto kept his own counsel on the 'alarming speculations' from London, responding to communications from neither Gie, Te Water nor the Dominions' Office.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁴ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246/Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 25 February 1939

⁵⁵ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246/Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 5 March 1939

⁵⁶ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246/Correspondence, Smuts to Arthur Gillett, 10 March 1939

⁵⁷ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246/Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 10 March 1939

⁵⁸ NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12, Te Water to Hertzog, 7 March 1939. The High Commissioners had been shown a copy of the cable in advance.

⁵⁹ NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12, Te Water to Hertzog, 7 March 1939; NASA SAB BTS 1/4/10 & 12, 16 January – 8 March 1939. Pirow depicted his report of his European visit as convincing Hertzog that war was inevitable and that thereafter the General sagely took what steps he could to keep South Africa neutral (see Pirow, *Hertzog*, p.227). As previously noted in Chapter One above, however, Pirow's biography of Hertzog appears designed to emphasise both Pirow's own importance and the

8 March cable however, encouraged him to take the opportunity to boost party morale by downplaying the probability of a politically divisive war breaking out in Europe. Accordingly, his speech to the Burger Commando officers' annual conference two days later was made available for public consumption, while the other addresses were delivered, as noted by *The Cape Times*, 'behind closed doors.'⁶⁰ The paper reported Hertzog's acknowledgement that the international situation had indeed appeared difficult three months earlier, but that he declared the position much improved since then. He denounced the view that war in Europe was now inevitable as 'irresponsible and foolish.' He admitted that the armaments race continued, but noted that 'British armament is being carried on only so that if anyone is determined on war Britain will be prepared for her enemies.' Likewise, it would be unwise for South Africa to ignore its own defences under the circumstances. The durability of peace would not depend on the actions of one nation, but of several, however for his own part he declared: 'I am convinced that there will be no general war for a considerable time.' He supplemented this with the remark 'that the cause of peace in Europe would be maintained, not only for today and tomorrow, but for all time.' Clearly Hertzog hoped that the worst was over.

Up to this point, however, the South African elite had at least shared a consensus about developments in Europe. The Sudeten crisis had not been worth a war, but its peaceful resolution had not meant perpetual peace could be taken for granted. Investment in defence had therefore continued unabated and even been expanded. South-West Africa was not for return, but in the interests of stability, it was preferable to satisfy German grievances about this, whether financially or with other people's territory. *Kristallnacht* had been inexcusable and the Germans had no one but themselves to blame for the international reaction, but engagement with the regime remained preferable to the alternatives. Beyond this point, however, consensus fell apart. Pirow, the Minister for Defence, returned from his European summits depressed by his failure to achieve a dramatic coup, but more importantly convinced that war was now inevitable. Te Water had come to a similar conclusion from his scrutiny of the accelerating arms race. Unwilling to accept this, but unable to provide an alternative vision, Hertzog had fallen silent until the news from London allowed him to once

General's prophetic statesmanship. In reality, Hertzog's silence on the subject of external affairs when the international situation appeared tense throughout this episode, combined with his readiness to leap on any apparent relaxation as evidence of the durability of peace, suggests a mindset that could not bring itself to accept the view that war was unavoidable. Pirow's version therefore appears unlikely, and if Hertzog confided his views on the subject in any of his other cabinet colleagues during this period, evidence of such uncharacteristic volubility has yet to emerge.

⁶⁰ NASA *Hertzog Papers* (A32) Vol. 123/Cuttings *Cape Town Times*, 11 March 1939

again credibly proclaim his belief in the durability of peace. Smuts, in contrast, had been convinced by Hitler's speech that war was all but unavoidable, and his view did not change with the tone of the cables. Gie alone remained relentlessly optimistic, at least about the short-term prospects for peace, although his prognosis for the longer term was more gloomy.

The Australian Reaction

In Australia, Cabinet did not sit from 13 December 1938 until 6 February 1939 and Parliament did not meet until 19 April.⁶¹ As the British High Commission in Canberra had pointed out, such periods led to inevitable difficulties in formulating policy if a crisis erupted, since ministers would disperse to their various constituencies across the country, rendering informed collective decision-making all but impossible.⁶² On this occasion, Colonel Hodgson even appealed to his minister, Billy Hughes, to intercede with the Prime Minister, to relocate the next cabinet meeting from Hobart on 6 February to 'a place where ministers can be available in time of emergency.'⁶³ While this did not happen, Lyons did arrange for John Curtin, the leader of the Opposition, to be shown copies of the telegrams from London.⁶⁴ Despite his party's difficulties on the subject, Curtin had already requested that Parliament be summoned due to the 'grave national danger.'⁶⁵ He replied to the Prime Minister on 31 January, insisting the cables required he 'repeat emphatically my request Parliament should meet immediately. Consider there is no alternative.'⁶⁶ Lyons, however, demurred. This was after both Hitler's speech and the statement Chamberlain had subsequently made on it. The Australian Prime Minister found nothing in either of these declarations to suggest a critical situation was developing and therefore cabled the leader of the Opposition that he saw no need for Parliament to meet.⁶⁷ Moreover, he continued, he considered that to do as Curtin suggested could be harmful, as it 'would create undue upset in the minds of people of Australia leading perhaps to economic and other upsets.' He did nevertheless provide Curtin with the polite but meaningless reassurance that Parliament

⁶¹ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Parts I & II, Cabinet Minutes, 18 October 1938 – 4 April 1939

⁶² TNA DO 35/554/82/101 Acting High Commissioner Canberra to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 2 September, 1938

⁶³ NLA *W. M. (Billy) Hughes Papers* (MS1538) Folder 5/Correspondence 1939, Hodgson to Hughes, 26 January, 1939

⁶⁴ NAA *Lyons Papers* CP/167/1 Correspondence 'C' Curtin, John to Lyons, Joseph Aloysius, 31 January, 1939

⁶⁵ NAA *Lyons Papers* CP/167/1 Correspondence 'C' Curtin, John to Lyons, Joseph Aloysius, 26 January, 1939

⁶⁶ NAA *Lyons Papers* CP/167/1 Correspondence 'C' Curtin, John to Lyons, Joseph Aloysius, 31 January, 1939

⁶⁷ NAA *Lyons Papers* CP/167/1 Correspondence 'C' Lyons, Joseph Aloysius to Curtin, John, 1 February, 1939

would of course be recalled should the government decide that developments required such a step.

Although Cabinet met on 6 February in Hobart, the minutes of the proceedings indicate it did not directly discuss the international situation.⁶⁸ It did, however, consider the question of conducting a national survey of manpower availability as urged by Brigadier Street, the new Minister of Defence. It agreed to do so, albeit on a voluntary basis. Much of the political 'sting' of this measure was also dispersed by the subsequent decision to also set up a National Women's Register. It also agreed to set up a committee to consider the benefits of amalgamating the territories of Papua and New Guinea, another clear indication that it had no intention of surrendering the mandate over the latter, despite Germany's apparent intention to recover its former territory. Both of these developments can be viewed as victories for a 'hawkish' perspective, and it is clear that Billy Hughes, the aggressive Minister for External Affairs, was no longer as isolated as he had been the previous September.⁶⁹ It was also clear that while 'hawks' might be in the ascendant for the moment, the 'doves' led by Lyons had not entirely abandoned their stance, as the manpower survey's voluntary nature could severely restrict its usefulness in the event the government sought to adopt compulsory military training (CMT), as the 'hawks' desired. Cabinet's divisions over the issue were exacerbated by the continuing leadership crisis. Casey wanted Lyons's blessing to succeed him and would do nothing to cross him, while Billy Hughes's instincts always favoured the more aggressive course, and Menzies's actions the previous autumn had already placed him in opposition to the Prime Minister.

Cabinet continued its deliberations the following day, deciding that military recruitment should be stepped up and that 'every volunteer offering in areas where units be established be accepted regardless of numbers.'⁷⁰ The practical consequences of this change from the previous policy of only accepting recruits in areas where numbers were considered sufficiently large to justify the step, might be slight, but it reflected the heightened anxiety consequent on the telegrams from London. Cabinet also considered the British government's communication that it was considering repudiating the General Act for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes by 15 February 1939. Here Billy Hughes was uncharacteristically cautious, urging that Cabinet should cable London expressing concern that this would only exacerbate international tensions in the current circumstances and recommending that no

⁶⁸ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Parts I & II, Cabinet Minutes, 6 February 1939

⁶⁹ See Chapter One.

⁷⁰ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Parts I & II, Cabinet Minutes, 6 February 1939

such step should be taken, particularly as Italy continued to adhere to the General Act, again evidence that Canberra was deeply concerned by the reports it was receiving. On the same date, Cabinet Sub-Committee No.1 also acquiesced in the proposal that the Covenant of the League of Nations be separated from the Peace Settlement in the hopes that this might reduce international tensions and this was subsequently approved by the full Cabinet on 14 February 1939.

Billy Hughes later reported on the worsening international situation for ministers on the 10th, although this was not discussed at cabinet.⁷¹ By this time, Canberra had not only received the Dominions' Office original cable, but the supplementary ones announcing London's decision to regard the integrity of the Netherlands and Switzerland as *casi belli*, the direction of Anglo-French talks against a German-Italian combination, Roosevelt's seemingly independent confirmation of the emerging threat, and the apparently relieved reaction to Hitler's speech in European capitals. Stirling, the External Affairs Liaison Officer in London, had also sent a description of a relatively optimistic conversation he had had with Sir Edward Bridges, the Cabinet Secretary in London, on the international situation on 20 January. This report, however, was apparently for completeness's sake as by the time of writing Stirling had seen the version of London's cable of 25 January sent to Washington and acknowledged that his account 'must be regarded in light of the later views set out there.'⁷²

Hughes seems to have agreed, as nothing was done to downplay the threat in the paper he had prepared for ministers.⁷³ This opened with the concession that it had seemed for some time after Munich that appeasement might succeed in dissipating potential sources of conflict before these ever developed into full-blown crises. It had to be acknowledged, however, that these hopes had failed to come to fruition and 'we must now reckon with the possibility of a sudden crisis involving immediately the four great powers.' The period since Munich had in fact been characterised by two major trends: the increasing assertion of Italian claims against France coupled with continued German restlessness despite the expectation that this would have ceased with the settlement of their grievances over the Sudetenland. These trends were exacerbated by the increasingly close relationship that seemed to be

⁷¹ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Parts I & II Cabinet Minutes, pp.1 -12 & A981/4/Exte/184 External Affairs Department, Cabinet Statements, Summary of European and Far Eastern Situation, 10 February, 1939 & NAA A2694 Vol.19, Parts I & II, Cabinet Minutes, 13 & 14 February 1939

⁷² NAA A981/4/GER 83 Part II, Stirling to Hodgson, 25 January 1939, p.3

⁷³ NAA A981/4/Exte/184 External Affairs Department, Cabinet Statements, Summary of European and Far Eastern Situation, 10 February, 1939

developing between these two potential aggressors. It had seemed that if Germany had acted in September, she would have acted alone, but this could no longer be counted on as being the case. Hitler's speech had shown that Germany would be at Italy's side if the latter became embroiled in war, while both London and Washington advised that Berlin and Rome either had entered, or were on the verge of entering, into a defensive and offensive arrangement, into which they were also trying to entice the Japanese. The paper used Roosevelt's citation of three separate, trustworthy sources in support of the threat to reinforce its credibility, never considering that these might have been London, Paris and the informant these latter had themselves been enlightened by.

Hughes continued, noting the Australians had no information as to whether Italian claims had been the subject of detailed discussion during Chamberlain and Halifax's visit to Rome but understood that Britain was prepared to mediate between Italy and France, should this prove acceptable to both parties. The Rome talks appeared to have been 'cordial.' However, subsequently doubts had emerged as to Italy's real intentions in Spain, due to statements by Sr. Gayda, an Italian publicist, although these had been disavowed by Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister. This did not appear to have resolved the issue, and French suspicions that Italy intended to exercise the influence it had achieved over the Nationalists in Spain remained a significant destabilising factor. Duncan, the Acting High Commissioner in London, had reported that he had discussed Italian moves with Sir Thomas Inskip, the new Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, but the latter had been sceptical about Mussolini's appetite for a confrontation, given the vulnerability of Italy's communication with its East African possessions through the Suez Canal.

The Minister for External Affairs considered that London had more in mind than Italy's ambitions, however, and it was German intentions on which real interest was focused. The cable of 25 January had identified three potential avenues; an attack on the Netherlands, a surprise air attack on Britain followed by a general offensive against the Western Powers, and a renewal of Germany's colonial claims. The possibility of an attack on Holland had been initially supported by a report from the Australian Counsellor in Washington, but he now reported the State Department was considering the possibility that these rumours had been circulated by the Germans themselves with a view to generating an offer for the return of their former colonies. Hughes considered that Hitler had not clarified German intentions on 30 January, despite the prior expectations that he would do so. Apart from the commitment to Italy, Hughes reported the German leader as focusing primarily on the

colonial question in substantially similar terms to previously. While conceding that tensions had reduced somewhat in the wake of the speech, the Minister for External Affairs noted that Stirling reported from London that 'the Foreign Office saw no grounds to suppose that Hitler had abandoned any of his aspirations or that anything he had said lessened the need for vigilance.' Indeed, Hughes observed that on 1 February the British Government had confirmed its provisional decision to regard a move against the Netherlands as a *casus belli* and had extended this to cover Switzerland as well. He further advised his colleagues that this decision had been communicated to the French and the British had also proposed to broaden the scope of the Anglo-French Staff talks to include war against Germany and Italy in combination. Belgium, it was added, had reaffirmed its commitment to neutrality in response to a query from London. These were the main issues affecting Europe, with others being of lesser import. After the fall of Barcelona, the government position in Spain appeared on the verge of collapse and it was reported that they were seeking terms from the Nationalists. The Czechs had granted the Germans right of free passage across their frontiers and these had now been drawn so that 'purely Czech areas have been taken over whenever it suited the German interests to do so, and vital Czech lines of communication had been cut.' German influence and economic activity was expanding relentlessly in eastern and central Europe. Polish policy was considered to be 'somewhat ambiguous.' They had renewed ties with the Soviets in November, but it now appeared that they were moving back into the German orbit with the visit of Colonel Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, to Hitler in January, and it was presumed this reflected a German intention to draw Poland into the Rome-Berlin axis. The question of a German corridor across the Polish Corridor also appeared 'to be under consideration.'

Hughes noted that Russian participation in a putative war in September had been dismissed as being of questionable value because of the impact of the purges on their armed forces. This conclusion could only be reinforced by the likelihood of increased domestic discontent from the cut in wage rates and rise in output targets ordered in early January, while the Japanese continued to tie down substantial Soviet forces in Siberia. The Yugoslav government had fallen and it remained to be seen whether its successor would be as successful in striking a balance between the Axis and the West. In the Far East, Japan had published its proposals for a solution in China. The Japanese had also indicated an interest in resolving British grievances in China, but complained that this was difficult while British policy remained essentially anti-Japanese. Britain had responded that without resolution of their grievances, progress toward a better relationship was difficult, and could not, in any

case, be at the expense of the Chinese. It might be thought that the fall of the Konoye government in Japan would strengthen the hand of the service ministers seeking closer ties with Germany and Italy, but there was no recent information on this. Developments in the Far East therefore could not be separated from those in Europe and the report concluded that it was apparent that 'for the moment, the dominant issues are in Europe.'

Hughes did not return to the subject of external affairs until 28 February, although on 15 February, Cabinet approved a cable to Wellington on the proposed agenda for the Pacific Defence Conference, a day on which the minutes indicate discussions had been dominated by Casey's proposal for a new scheme to replace the government's flagship National Insurance Scheme on which no agreement could be reached.⁷⁴ On the 16th Cabinet accepted the respective ministers' recommendations on a dry dock for a capital ship and a memorandum by the Chairman of the National Manpower Committee on the proposed National Register.⁷⁵ On the 27th Cabinet deferred consideration of the report by the Inspector-General of Armed Forces into the expansion of Australia's permanent forces, ordered the reconsideration of the circularisation list for the war book and agreed the establishment of a National Women's Register.⁷⁶ On the 28th, Cabinet was again unable to reach a decision on the Inspector-General's report and Hughes briefed ministers on the international situation, although this was only 'for information.'⁷⁷ Since the Minister for External Affairs last report for ministers, Stirling, had forwarded a number of reports containing a mixture of reassuring and disturbing news. He had advised that the Hungarians discounted aggressive intentions on the part of Germany.⁷⁸ However, the independence of their view was rather undermined by their adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact.⁷⁹ More comfortingly, the Swiss discounted any immediate threat to their independence, but were less sanguine about the prospects of Germany attacking France through Swiss territory in the event of war.⁸⁰ There was widespread relief, however, at the perceived moderation of

⁷⁴ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 15 February 1939, pp.1 -

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⁷⁵ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 16 February 1939, p.2

⁷⁶ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 27 February 1939, p.2

⁷⁷ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 28 February 1939

⁷⁸ NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 'Germany: Foreign Policy', 3 February 1939 (via air mail - due 13 February 1939) & NAA A981/4/Exte/184 External Affairs Department, Cabinet Statements, Draft Statement for Members, 28 February, 1939, p.2

⁷⁹ See, for instance, NASA, SAB BTS 1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, SSFDA to Hertzog, 16 January 1939.

⁸⁰ NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 'Germany: Internal Situation', 1 February 1939 (via air mail - due 11 February 1939), & 'Switzerland', 8 February 1939 (via air mail - due 18 February 1939)

Hitler's speech on 30 January.⁸¹ The German press had concentrated on these generally favourable responses, but, less comfortably, had studiously avoided mentioning any qualifications that accompanied them, such as Chamberlain's caveat that progress depended on German recognition of the necessity for a limitation on armaments.⁸² Germany itself faced economic difficulties, but this could equally be interpreted as either a stabilising factor inhibiting foreign adventures, or a destabilising one provoking them as a distraction from domestic woes.⁸³ More unambiguously disturbing was the evidence that Berlin was depicting Munich as a victory for German might, apparently in order to impress on the people the need to make further sacrifices for their country's strength, which appeared to indicate what tack the regime was likely to take.⁸⁴ If they wished to challenge London, it seemed they would need to do so sooner rather than later on economic grounds, although it had been previously reported that the army would be reluctant to consider any action before June.⁸⁵ Evidence of the continuing level of tension in Britain could also be discerned from the news that a paper, not circulated to the dominions, written by an anonymous 'German expert' and which had reached Whitehall by the circuitous route of Rennie Smith, a former Labour M.P., and Vansittart, the former Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, was taken sufficiently seriously to be placed before Cabinet, rather to Stirling's surprise.⁸⁶ The paper itself depicted Germany as being primarily interested in eastern expansion, but needing to render the West impotent prior to embarking on any such project, due to concerns over the durability of agreements reached with democratic forms of government, which scarcely made comforting reading.⁸⁷ As well as these reports from Stirling, Halifax had also taken the opportunity offered by his meeting with the dominion High Commissioners on 17 February, to provide

⁸¹ NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 'France: Reactions to Herr Hitler's Speech', 3 February 1939 (via air mail - due 13 February 1939) 'Germany: Press Opinion', 8 February 1939 (via air mail - due 18 February 1939), 'Germany: Reactions Abroad to Herr Hitler's Reichstag Speech', 8 February 1939 (via air mail - due 18 February 1939), & 'Germany: Herr Hitler's Reichstag Speech', 10 February 1939 (via air mail - due 20 February 1939)

⁸² NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 'Germany: Press Opinion', 8 February 1939 (via air mail - due 18 February 1939), pp. 2 - 3

⁸³ NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 'Germany', 1 January 1939 (via air mail - due 11 January 1939), 'Germany: Internal Situation', 1 February 1939 (via air mail - due 11 February 1939) & 'Germany: Economic Situation', 8 February 1939 (via airmail - due 18 February 1939)

⁸⁴ NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 'Germany: Internal Situation', 1 February 1939 (via air mail - due 11 February 1939)

⁸⁵ NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 'Germany', 1 January 1939 (via air mail - due 11 January 1939) & 'Germany: Economic Situation', 8 February 1939 (via air mail - due 18 February 1939)

⁸⁶ Stirling, however, obtained a copy for Hodgson, but emphasised that he had done so 'privately', NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 10 February 1939 (via air mail - due 20 February 1939)

⁸⁷ Anonymous German Expert, 'Armaments & German Policy' NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 3 February 1939 (via air mail - due 13 February 1939)

the rather opaque opinion that he now believed the reports emanating from Germany at the start of the year had either been exaggerated or designed to intimidate the West, although the exact opposite might just as easily turn out to be true.⁸⁸ These diverse messages from London therefore suggested the only real positive that could be taken from the situation was that nothing had actually happened yet. Whether or not it would, remained to be seen.

Billy Hughes had no doubt where responsibility lay, writing in a 28 February draft for cabinet: 'the present international tension derives chiefly from uncertainty as to the intentions of two powers, Germany and Italy.'⁸⁹ He discounted Japan as, despite its perennial interest to Australia, concern had faded into the background once more, on the assumption it would not strike unless Britain already found itself engaged with the former pair. It appeared, moreover, that Tokyo was proving resistant to pressure from its partners to formalise the Anti-Comintern Pact into a regular alliance, even if the fall of Hainan was an important strategic development and the prospects for non-Japanese interests in Japanese-controlled China continued to be bleak. With regard to Germany and Italy, there was as yet insufficient evidence to draw a firm conclusion as to their aims, and what evidence there was, was unfortunately contradictory in its nature. Referring to the messages from London, Hughes noted there had been reports of German plans for aggression since the beginning of the year but so far these appeared to be no more than rumours. Other concerns arose from the accelerated pace of the arms race since September, the dismissal of Dr. Schacht and Germany's economic difficulties, which last Hitler had specifically referred to in his recent speech. These combined with the continuing hostility shown to Britain and the United States since *Kristallnacht* indicated 'there has been no ground for assuming German policy during the present year would be quiescent.' It now seemed less likely that German ambitions were directed towards establishing a puppet Ukrainian state as Poland, with its large Ukrainian minority, did not appear particularly concerned, having apparently been reassured by the recent summit between Colonel Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, and Hitler. Germany seemed to be preoccupied with absorbing Czechoslovakia into its economic sphere and the political and economic penetration of the Balkan region, although it had to be admitted that German trade arrangements bore little resemblance to traditional economic treaties and 'seem more designed to divert business, no matter at what immediate cost, into German channels.' Italy had mounted a series of claims against France, although these had yet to

⁸⁸ Halifax as cited in TNA DO 121/5 Minute of Meeting between Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs and Dominion High Commissioners, 17 February 1939

⁸⁹ NAA A981/4/Exte/184 External Affairs Department, Cabinet Statements, Draft Statement for Members, 28 February, 1939, p.1

achieve official status. The Italian government had, however, unilaterally disavowed the Mussolini-Laval Pact of 1935 and informed the French government it 'would formulate its claims "in due course and due form."' The French Foreign Minister had responded by publicly stating that 'any attempt to enforce such a demand could only lead to war.' Fears of joint German-Italian action had been inspired by backing for Italy's claims in the German press combined with Hitler's undertaking to be found at Italy's side if the latter became involved in war. Hughes here chose to ignore the qualification contained in Stirling's report on the British analysis of Hitler's speech, that the German Propaganda Ministry had subsequently restricted Germany's commitment to ideological wars and that even the original German text 'also implies provocation.' The Minister for External Affairs went on to describe the consequent expression of shared aims from Britain and France in response to this perceived threat as 'remarkably outspoken.' He considered the most worrying aspect currently to be the strengthening of Italian forces in Africa, with a presumed view to pressing their claims over Tunis and Djibouti, while noting that the French had also just reviewed their position in North Africa. He thought, however, that matters would turn on how the Italians framed their claims and to what extent these turned out to affect France's 'vital interest.' Hughes also pointed out that Hitler on 30 January had looked forward to 'a long period of peace.' The Minister for External Affairs drew comfort from the fact that this undoubtedly reflected the profound wishes of the German people and that preliminary economic contacts had already commenced between the German and British sides, following the opening Hitler had provided in his Reichstag speech. Hughes was also impressed by the apparently firmer stance emanating from Washington in recent weeks, concluding that this significantly improved the prospects for the international situation.

Hughes was not present at the next meeting of Cabinet in Sydney on 2 March.⁹⁰ According to the minutes, discussion of the contentious issue of National Insurance again continued without conclusion. Cabinet also took the opportunity to exclude the Minister for External Affairs from a committee set up to consider a response to a communication from the Japanese Consul, although this committee contained the other 'big beasts'; Lyons, Page, Menzies and Casey. Stirling's next report from London was a lengthy one and paved the way for the Dominions Office telegram of 8 March.⁹¹ Although dated 22 February, it had been sent by air mail and was not due to arrive in Canberra until 4 March, too late for inclusion in Billy Hughes's statement above. In his letter, Stirling covered the return of Sir Nevile

⁹⁰ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 2 March 1939

⁹¹ NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 'Germany', 20 December 1938 (via air mail - due 9 January 1939)

Henderson, the British Ambassador to Berlin, to his post after extended leave on health grounds. Stirling had already uncharacteristically expressed a marked preference for the Ambassador's reports over those of his stand-in, Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, as the Australian liaison officer considered the former had more contacts and a better feel for what was really going on in Germany, while the latter lacked 'the keen mind and cool judgement of Sir N. Henderson.'⁹² The latest missive certainly differed significantly from the earlier ones, with their cautious pessimism replaced by a more confident optimism. Henderson had discounted the recent concerns over German intentions, believing instead that Hitler, impressed by the enthusiasm of the German people for Chamberlain, was determined to maintain the peace, although he had acknowledged more realistically that 'Germany is not going to be a lamb with which in the future it will be comfortable to lie down.'⁹³ In support he had cited a recent conversation with Goering where the latter had announced his imminent departure for a long-term rest in San Remo. Henderson had believed Goering to be quite sincere in his professions for peace, noting their consistency with similar remarks made by Ribbentrop and concluding that it was in fact Hitler who was behind this changed outlook. It was also worthy of note that Weizsäcker, the permanent head of the German Foreign Office, had forecast that nothing would disturb Anglo-German relations during 1939 in the way they had been disturbed during 1938. This comforting news was then followed by the Dominions Office cable of 8 March that it appeared that if there had been any danger of a sudden German strike westwards that that danger had now passed.

Cabinet met the same day, but the minutes indicate the meeting was an unusually lengthy one, dominated by the question of National Insurance, although Hughes did take the opportunity to raise the issue of the strategic importance of oil, both within and outwith Australian territory.⁹⁴ Cabinet also agreed that Page, Casey, Menzies and Thorby should report back on the co-ordination of development and defence, which was to be discussed at the next conference with the state premiers on 31 March, and finally managed to approve the Inspector-General's recommendations that military formations be grouped into commands and the establishment of a staff corps with defined roles. At this point, Page, the main sponsor of the concept of co-ordinating defence and development, disillusioned by his experience of the October conference with the premiers, envisaged proceeding without them

⁹² NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 'Germany', 20 December 1938 (via air mail - due 9 January 1939)

⁹³ NAA A981/4/GER 83 Pt. 2, Stirling to Hodgson, 'Germany - United Kingdom', 22 February 1939 (via air mail - due 4 March 1939)

⁹⁴ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 8 March 1939, p.1

and using a specially appointed 'co-ordination Czar' to cajole them into co-operation retrospectively. Cabinet met again the next day and agreed a further raft of recommendations from the Inspector-General's report.⁹⁵ Permission was however refused for the Tasmanian Premier to have free use of a land-line to broadcast on the issue of defence. A decision on representation at the Pacific Defence Conference in Wellington was also deferred despite the imminence of that event, while vitally ministers continued to be unable to reach a decision on the crucial issue of National Insurance. In this charged situation, the cable from London announcing it considered the 'war scare' episode to be at an end did not even merit an official mention.

On 10 March, Cabinet finally agreed that a new National Insurance scheme was required.⁹⁶ This session, with just four other items on the agenda (the rubber-stamping of ministers' decisions on the National Register and trade negotiations with the U.S.A., the decision not to assist education for refugees and the deferral of consideration of alterations to Sydney Post Office to their next meeting) lasted from 9.45 a.m. to 4.15 p.m., indicating the contentiousness of the issue. Cabinet had not been due to meet until Tuesday the 14th, but met again on the Monday, when the issue was again raised and deferred.⁹⁷ Cabinet also revisited its decision on the committee for the amalgamation of the administrations of the territories of Papua and New Guinea. Federal funding for roads was reconsidered as well 'with special reference to Defence (*sic*) requirements.' The smouldering issues of social security and Lyons's leadership finally erupted into full-blown crisis the following day, 14 March 1939, when Menzies resigned from Cabinet, citing differences with the Prime Minister over National Insurance and Defence.⁹⁸ He was replaced with immediate effect as Attorney-General by Billy Hughes, who combined this role with his pre-existing one as Minister for External Affairs.

In Australia, the 'war scare' played out against a background dominated by the twin issues of the succession and National Insurance. The perception that Lyons was on his way out undermined his ability to lead his colleagues and sharpened their disputes as they jockeyed to place themselves in pole position for when he departed. The government's National Insurance measures were due to come fully into force on 4 September 1939, but doubts as to

⁹⁵ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 9 March 1939, pp.1 - 2

⁹⁶ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 10 March 1939

⁹⁷ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 13 March 1939

⁹⁸ NLA *Menzies Papers* (MS4936) Box 579, Menzies to Lyons, 14 March 1939 & Lyons to Menzies, 14 March 1939

its affordability led to a desperate search for a replacement scheme that could command support. This quest was vastly complicated by the conflicting ambitions of the leading personalities in cabinet. In the end only Menzies resigned, but the issue had come to command cabinet's attention to the detriment of other matters. In terms of external affairs, Menzies had been moving towards a more 'hawkish' position, so that his departure weakened that voice within cabinet, but his replacement by Billy Hughes, who also continued to hold the office of Minister for External Affairs, greatly increased the importance of the most implacable 'hawk' in the government. While Lyons had managed to fairly easily deflect Curtin's demands to recall Parliament at the outset of this episode, he had had to accept his colleagues' wishes to implement a national register of manpower availability, albeit with the concession that this would be on a voluntary basis. The 'war scare' provided Billy Hughes with the opportunity to boost his profile in the succession stakes, however. The Minister for External Affairs had been drafted in to add some much needed drive to the lack-lustre recruitment campaign for the militia prior to Christmas and emphasising the gravity of the international situation would reinforce the importance of both that role and his ministerial one.⁹⁹ Brigadier Street had only replaced Thorby as Minister of Defence in November and as such a new entrant to cabinet was a relatively negligible element politically.¹⁰⁰

While the opportunity existed, Hughes therefore spared no effort to accentuate international tensions. In his report of 10 February, he noted that European issues continued to dominate the international situation, raising the spectre of a sudden crisis developing between the four powers. He drew attention to Italy and Germany's increased restiveness and co-operation together with their approaches to Japan since Munich, while emphasising German ruthlessness in the implementation of that settlement. He considered that Hitler had failed to clarify his intentions in his 30 January speech, but had placed a great deal of weight on the Colonial Question. The obvious implications of this for Australia's position in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea were left unstated. Hughes's report of the 28th went further, explicitly blaming Germany and Italy for the sense of crisis. He did, however, have to admit: that the threats reported to be stalking Europe had yet to materialise; that the Franco-Italian situation might be capable of peaceful resolution; and that Hitler had referred to a long period of peace, which undoubtedly reflected the wishes of his people. Hughes nonetheless saw no grounds for complacency. The increased pace of German armaments, the departure

⁹⁹ See Chapter Three, above.

¹⁰⁰ *Idem.*

of Schacht and Germany's ongoing economic problems all gave continuing cause for concern. Britain and France had demonstrated considerable resolution and he discerned a new firmer stance in Washington which was also to be welcomed. The implication Australia should likewise display determination in external affairs was left unspoken. That this uncompromising view of international tensions coincided with his own instinctive interpretation of the situation need not be doubted. Billy Hughes brought his bellicosity with him to external affairs; external affairs did not make him bellicose.¹⁰¹ After the 28th his opportunity to promote the importance of external affairs faded rapidly, though, as the crisis over what to do about National Insurance peaked, exacerbated by the internecine feuding of cabinet over the question of the succession. Hughes, however, did relatively well from this, coming away as both Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs, emphasising his increased stature in Lyons's post-Menzies government.

Apathy in Wellington

In the period immediately prior to the despatch of the Dominions Office telegram which generated all this anxiety elsewhere, Jordan was distracted by the need both for his presence in Geneva and to counter what he saw as the latest move by the forces he believed were conducting a co-ordinated campaign to discredit New Zealand and its government in London.¹⁰² He did not, in fact, formally comment on the 25 January message from London until 24 March, when, in a letter to Savage, he finally acknowledged the existence of 'the interesting cable, No.20, concerning Holland.' He justified his previous silence on the grounds that 'the information given therein was shortly after contradicted and I know you prefer to have something definite, leaving the confusion to square itself up.' This may have been a face-saving device to explain away his preceding neglect of the matter, but had his government actually been particularly concerned to obtain his views on the subject, they could have asked him for them directly. No doubt they shared his sense of priority on the issue. New Zealand's financial position remained dire and everything had to be done to shore up their image in London, so countering any negative comment there was vital. Savage had indeed previously written to Jordan on 3 March warmly praising his efforts in doing so, without taking the opportunity to enquire about the European situation or how it had

¹⁰¹ See Chapter One, above.

¹⁰² NANZ/PM/10/1939+ Correspondence/Jordan to Savage, 13 January 1939; in this case, a talk by the economist, Professor H. F. Hall on the 4 January 1939 over the BBC that criticised New Zealand's domestic economic policies, see NANZ/PM/10/1939+ Correspondence/Savage to Jordan, 12 January 1939, Jordan to Ogilvie, 13 January 1939, Jordan to MacDonald, 13 January 1939, Jordan to Savage, 13 January 1939,

developed since telegram No.20.¹⁰³ Politically, the presidency of the Council of the League of Nations also remained a prestigious role which equally could not be neglected. Set against this, it was clear a German invasion of the Low Countries meant war and Wellington could not hope to prevent, or even influence, Hitler's actions in this regard. They were already doing everything they could to prepare for the worst; reaching out to Britain and Australia through the proposed Pacific Defence Conference, while bolstering their defences through the work of Colonel Stevens, the Secretary of the Organisation for National Security, and the Chiefs of Staff.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, Savage had taken to his bed during one of his bad periods, while Labour's internal difficulties emerged into the public domain with the leaking of the infamous 'Jack Lee Letter.'¹⁰⁵ The triumvirates' silence on the 'interesting telegram, No.20' of the 25 January, is therefore as readily understandable as Jordan's.¹⁰⁶ There was nothing they could do about it, and they scarcely lacked alternative issues requiring their urgent attention.

Overview

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this episode was the degree of passivity exhibited by the dominions in contrast to their interventionist behaviour the previous September.¹⁰⁷ The situation was, however, completely different. Then, there had been a problem that was sufficiently well-defined that a solution, however unattractive, presented itself and Australia, Canada and South Africa had all urged this course on London. New Zealand, it is true, distracted by domestic events and their responsibilities in Geneva, had remained relatively quiet then, confining themselves to a few anodyne messages expressing a fairly general support for Britain, without any particular commitment to specific British government policies. All the dominions had, however, congratulated Chamberlain on the fact of a settlement, even if the terms came to enjoy a less unanimous support. This time around it was clearly impossible, though, to advise Chamberlain to offer his services as mediator. He could not arbitrate a problem which the Germans steadfastly denied existed and, in any case, which had not even been defined sufficiently clearly to indicate how it might be resolved.

¹⁰³ NANZ/PM/16/1939+ Correspondence/Savage to Jordan, 3 March 1939

¹⁰⁴ See above, Chapters Three & Four.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter One, above.

¹⁰⁶ There is no indication of any contact with either Whitehall or New Zealand House on the subject NANZ EA/1/58/8/1 Part 1a & PM/16 Correspondence 39+

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter Two, above.

In light of these conditions, discussions with London held no attractions for any of the dominions. New Zealand was anyway again preoccupied with domestic difficulties and its role at the League of Nations. Likewise, Canberra's attention was increasingly drawn to the domestic arena. Lyons remained as averse to war as ever, but the situation provided him with nothing to say and his cabinet was imploding over the issues of National Insurance and the succession. Billy Hughes might have been temporarily able to use the international tension to boost his standing in cabinet, but there was equally nothing for him to suggest to London. He would, in any case, have needed Lyons's support for any such approach and this was never likely to be forthcoming, given the disparity in their outlooks on external affairs. Canada had simply reverted to previous practice. Advising London was only desirable if there was a peaceful course to encourage, otherwise it might be taken for consultation, which could in turn be seen as creating commitments that would infringe on 'Parliament's right to decide.' Mackenzie King had not, however, entirely abandoned the idea of personal intervention and wrote to Hitler in the belief that a reminder of their encounter in 1937 would prove beneficial.

More surprising was South Africa's reaction. Hertzog had never felt troubled by the ethical consideration that exercising influence created an obligation that would restrict Parliament's future freedom of action. He had unashamedly sought to cajole the British into avoiding European entanglements, bombarded his representatives with requests for information and never given the slightest indication that he saw this as involving any commitment on his part. This time, he remained enigmatically silent. Previously he had vigorously denounced any increased involvement with Paris. Now he allowed the news that staff talks with the French were being expanded to pass without comment. Similarly, where he had previously unambiguously stated the Union had no interest in a war where Britain joined France if the conflict arose out of a German attack on the Czechs, the news that Britain had decided the integrity of Switzerland and the Netherlands were *casi belli* excited no response. Even when Te Water referred specifically to these 'two new and vital commitments', the General did not see fit to comment. While he had warned the British that his government saw no South African interest in eastern European entanglements, he had never extended this to western Europe. Likewise, he had had confined the secret cabinet neutrality pact to conflicts originating in eastern Europe. He took no steps now to change either of these conditions.

Naturally secretive and aloof, the reasons for his silence are hard to discern. Pirow took credit for convincing the General that war was inevitable on the former's return from Europe

and claimed that the latter thereafter began to take all possible steps to keep South Africa neutral. The problem with this view is that Hertzog appeared to take no steps at all at this time. If conflict was really unavoidable and Hertzog was determined on neutrality as Pirow supposed, British policy might indeed be left to develop unhindered, whether this involved committing themselves to supporting the integrity of small, independent countries or entering into ever closer arrangements with the French. Steps, however, would have had to be taken to prepare the South African cabinet for an extension of the Neutrality Pact to cover western, as well as eastern, Europe. Hertzog had regarded it as essential the previous September that agreement was reached in advance, so that the government was not left floundering when the moment of crisis was upon them. Yet he took no such steps at this time. The only possible explanations are that Hertzog himself saw no need for South African neutrality in such circumstances; that he did not yet accept that war was inevitable; or both.

Hertzog had previously convinced himself of Hitler's essential peacefulness, once Germany's Versailles grievances were satisfied, and the General's behaviour during this episode appears consistent with this view. Unlike the summer of 1938, he had no material, of whatever quality, to counter the gloomy messages from London. Even Gie's reports from Berlin were only optimistic with regard to the short and not the long term. The very nature of the 'war scare' was also imprecise and vague, inviting little by way of response. There was no specific grievance to satisfy and no definite threat to ward off. He therefore had little option but to remain silent. Once, however, the news from London seemed to improve, Hertzog lost no time in reaffirming his belief in peace in Europe 'for all time.'¹⁰⁸ In the unlikely, from his perspective, event he was proved wrong, he had no objection to participating in a conflict originating in western Europe, as, from his point of view, this would be a 'necessary war.'¹⁰⁹ This was certainly not Te Water's view, as indicated in his reports to the Prime Minister, but Hertzog does not appear to have ever felt any necessity to explain himself to his subordinates.¹¹⁰ A war originating with an unprovoked attack on the Netherlands was also less likely to provoke *Afrikaner* sentiment.

Likewise, Italian involvement would also make a conflict more acceptable. While his government were prepared to subsidise Italian shipping in an effort to diversify the economy away from its dependence on Britain, it had also resolutely opposed Mussolini's Abyssinian

¹⁰⁸ NASA *Hertzog Papers* (A32) Vol. 123/Cuttings *Cape Town Times*, 11 March 1939

¹⁰⁹ See Chapter One, above.

¹¹⁰ See, for instance, NASA/SAB/BTS/1/4/4/German Colonial Policy/Hertzog to Dr. Gie, 15 September 1937

adventure.¹¹¹ This stance was not just due to an attachment to collective security both on its own merits and as an alternative to reliance on the British navy; the Italian policy of raising units from the native inhabitants of their conquests deeply disturbed the South African mind-set.¹¹² As Gie had indicated in 1936 to Te Water, Italy was not a welcome neighbour, even as far away as the Horn of Africa.¹¹³ He also saw the Mediterranean, with its importance for communications, to be more clearly a South African concern than the eastern European *status quo*. It therefore seems likely General Hertzog did not warn the British this time, because, unlike with the Sudeten Crisis, he saw no need to do so in the prevailing circumstances. He might have faced difficulties from his more isolationist *Afrikaner* supporters, even with respect to the Netherlands, but Hertzog was never one to shy away from riding roughshod over those who had the temerity to disagree with what, in his infinite wisdom, he had decided on for their benefit. There was therefore no reason to say anything until the episode was over, and so he remained silent.

While the dominions did not seek to influence London, the episode was not without its effects on them. Australia and New Zealand were admittedly too wound up in their own domestic problems to pay much attention to something they could not hope to influence. In Canada, however, resolve faltered. Mackenzie King had been pressing ahead with rearmament and trying to prepare cabinet and country for the possibility of war. While the criticism he received for this undoubtedly played a part in undermining his resolution, a part was also played by the panicked nature of the messages from Whitehall, which critically undermined the Canadian Prime Minister's faith in London's judgement. His previous reiteration of Laurier's remark considerably diminished the impact of this development, however. He could not qualify or walk away from this without appearing weak, which he was not prepared to do, but standing by it significantly reduced the options available to him. The result was that he was left feeling isolated and vulnerable, at a time when he was already stressed over perceived slights to his prospective role during the forthcoming Royal Visit to North America. In South Africa, Hertzog was able to use the end of the episode to boost party morale by publicly reasserting his faith in peace. The most significant development, however, was his colleague Smuts move in the opposite direction. Smuts became convinced that the imminent end of the Spanish Civil War would lead Italy, either acting on its own volition or at Germany's behest, to repudiate its obligation to leave Spain, leading to a

¹¹¹ NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78) Vol. 14/Correspondence, Smuts to Te Water, 24 July 1936

¹¹² See, for instance, *Idem, Ibid.*, Gie to Te Water, 20 May & 4 June 1936, & Vol. 16/Correspondence, Te Water to Ben Tillett, 10 May 1938

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, Gie to Te Water, 20 May 1936

confrontation with the West. He believed that the democracies had no appetite for backing down a second time. The news of Hitler's backing for Mussolini in his 30 January speech was therefore critical for Smuts. The latter feared this made war all but inevitable, whether as an act of deliberate aggression or misplaced bluff. London's embarrassing climb-down over Hitler's supposed intentions for an unprovoked and unheralded westward strike left him unmoved. He held that the real issue lay in the German commitment to Italy and that nothing had happened to reduce the significance of this. He therefore remained deeply pessimistic about the prospects for peace, going forward.

5: THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN: THE MARCH INTO PRAGUE AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS

On 15 March 1939, to the astonishment of the world, the Germans walked into Czecho-Slovakia unopposed.¹ As noted in the previous chapter, the Dominions Office had finally conceded only the previous week that it seemed Hitler was not, after all, about to make an immediate move.² This rapidly changed. On Saturday, 11 March, Inskip cabled the dominion Prime Ministers with the news of a new crisis in Czecho-Slovakia, and that German intentions toward that country were unclear, but that Sir Nevile Henderson believed Berlin intended to eliminate the rump state.³ Previously, it had been anticipated that Prague would drift gradually and peacefully into the German orbit and this was what had appeared to be happening.⁴ The following Monday, a cable from London reported the apparent resolution of the internal Czecho-Slovak crisis, coupled with the ominous switch by the German press to protesting about the treatment of the remaining Germans in Czecho-Slovakia.⁵ On Tuesday, Whitehall reported German troop movements in the direction of Bohemia, the Slovak declaration of independence and that the Czech President and Minister for Foreign Affairs had left for Berlin.⁶ The next day, the dominion governments were informed by Inskip in neutral tones of the establishment of the German protectorate and the subsequent occupation of Bohemia and Moravia.⁷

Chamberlain initially appears to have gone into shock over these developments, until Halifax and the rest of the cabinet forced him to recognise that a watershed had been

¹ The republic's new official name after the post-Munich constitutional rearrangements, see Kershaw, *Nemesis*, p.164

² NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Dominion Prime Ministers, Circular Telegram B No. 86, 8 March 1939

³ NAA A981(4)/Cze/21/Czechoslovakia – Relations with Germany - Letters & Despatches/Inskip to dominion Prime Ministers, 11 March 1939

⁴ Newton (British Minister at Prague) as cited in NAA A981(4)/Cze/6/Czechoslovakia – Admin. Govt./Stirling to Hodgson, 23 December 1938; later, the Czechs indeed agreed, for instance, to harmonise their economic and Jewish policies with the Germans; permit Wehrmacht rail transit across their territory; and appeared to be following the German lead in suppressing Communism and free speech in the press - see NAA A981(4)/Ger/83/Part 2/German Foreign Policy/Inskip to Dominion Prime Ministers, 31 January 1939

⁵ LAC EA RG25/D1 Vol.72/5, Inskip to dominion prime ministers, 13 March 1939

⁶ LAC EA RG25/D1 Vol.72/5, Inskip to dominion prime ministers, 14 March 1939, Parts I & II

⁷ LAC EA RG25/D1 Vol.72/5, Inskip to dominion prime ministers, 15 March 1939.

reached.⁸ This resulted in his 17 March Birmingham speech, which publicly condemned recent German actions.⁹ A succinct cable of the same day to the dominions, merely noted that the British Ambassador in Berlin 'had been ordered to return to London to report at his earliest convenience.'¹⁰ The following day, British anger was more evident. The Dominions Office advised dominion prime ministers that Sir Neville Henderson had been instructed to inform the Germans that the British regarded 'events of the past few days as a complete repudiation of the Munich Agreement.'¹¹ The Germans were also to be told that London considered their military action in Czecho-Slovakia was 'devoid of any basis of legality.'

On 19 March, the dominions were informed by cable that two days previously Bucharest's Minister in the United Kingdom had appealed to Lord Halifax for assistance, wrongly asserting that a German ultimatum had been received, and that without British support his country would be forced to capitulate.¹² On 21 March 1939, London again cabled the dominions with their response to this request. The British had firstly conducted a survey of European capitals as to how they would react to a threat to Romanian independence.¹³ The results of this had proved to be disappointing, and they therefore now proposed that they, together with France, Russia and Poland, should make a public declaration that they would immediately consult each other in the event of any threatening action taking place. Unknown to the dominions, however, the Poles were proving reluctant to engage with the Soviets because of the potential German reaction.¹⁴ After some heated discussion, Chamberlain persuaded his cabinet that Poland, rather than Russia, was crucial as the cornerstone for a coalition against aggression.¹⁵ The French had come, by their own circuitous route, to the same conclusion.¹⁶ In the meantime, the German seizure of Memel on 23rd March aroused surprisingly little outrage, given the level of feeling that Prague had generated. However, the region was ethnically predominantly German and its cession had long been discounted.¹⁷

⁸ Watt, *How War Came*, pp.167-68

⁹ *Idem.*

¹⁰ NAA A981(4)/Ger/83/Part 2/German Foreign Policy/Inskip to Dominion Prime Ministers, 17 March 1939

¹¹ NAA A981(4)/Ger/83/Part 2/German Foreign Policy/Inskip to Dominion Prime Ministers, 18 March 1939

¹² NASA SAB PM 1/20/1, UK Foreign Policy, Inskip to Dominion Prime Ministers, 19 March 1939; see also Watt, *How War Came*, p.170

¹³ NAA A981(4)/Ger/83/Part 2/German Foreign Policy/Inskip to Dominion Prime Ministers, 21 March 1939.

¹⁴ Watt, *How War Came*, pp. 176 & 179

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.181

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.178-9

¹⁷ NASA SAB BTS/1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Gie to Hertzog, 16 January 1939; Rothwell, *Origins*, p.100

The British shared the full force of their concern with the dominions in a telegram on the 28 March.¹⁸ Prague had 'clearly revealed Germany's intentions.' These were plainly to subjugate Eastern Europe so that Germany could move west, without the risk of 'a war on two fronts.' Warsaw, however, had proved reluctant to take up their assigned role in this design by undertaking to stand by Bucharest and there matters rested for the moment. Subsequently intelligence reports suddenly suggested Germany was about to make an immediate move against the Poles, rather than the Romanians, but London did not immediately pass this on to its Commonwealth partners.¹⁹ The British did, however, hastily shift their focus from Romania to Poland. On 30 March, telegrams were sent to Warsaw and Paris for consultation, proposing that Chamberlain guarantee Polish independence and, at that point, the dominions were informed, but not consulted, about this step by a cable of the same date.²⁰ At the same time, Inskip explained away the lack of consultation to the dominion High Commissioners by saying that there had not been time for such a step, and that indeed the dominions 'would not have wished that the United Kingdom should invite them to share in the responsibility.'²¹

Those consulted had assented by the morning of the 31st and the dominions were duly informed of this in another telegram.²² Chamberlain appears to have thought the terms of the guarantee would retain the diplomatic initiative for London.²³ Inskip, however, had admitted to the dominion High Commissioners in his meeting with them on 30 March, that it would be up to the Poles to decide whether an attack on Danzig constituted a threat to their independence, implying that Britain's fate was now in Warsaw's hands.²⁴ Nevertheless, the British government anticipated at this time that the rest of the blocks of this 'peace front' would fall into line in due course. All this was thrown into turmoil by the Italian move against Albania. The Italians resented that they had been left in the dark by the Germans over Czecho-Slovakia and they resolved to demonstrate their independence by a move of their

¹⁸ NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Inskip to Dominion Prime Ministers, Circular Telegram B No. 122, 28 March 1939

¹⁹ Rothwell, *Origins*, p.103

²⁰ Watt, *How War Came*, pp. 176 & 179; NAA A981(4)/GER 67 Part 1/Germany – Relations with Poland, SSFDA to dominion Prime Ministers, 30 March 1939

²¹ Inskip, Sir Thomas, SSFDA, as cited in TNA DO 121/5, Meetings between Secretary of State and dominion High Commissioners, January – August 1939, 30 March 1939, p.8

²² NAA A981(4)/GER 67 Part 1/Germany – Relations with Poland, Inskip to dominion Prime Ministers, 31 March 1939

²³ Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/1092 as cited in Watt, *How War Came*, p.186

²⁴ Chamberlain, Neville as cited in NAA A981(4)/GER 67 Part 1/Germany – Relations with Poland, SSFDA to dominion Prime Ministers, 1 April 1939; Inskip, Sir Thomas, SSFDA, as cited in TNA DO 121/5, Meetings between Secretary of State and dominion High Commissioners, January – August 1939, 30 March 1939, p.3

own.²⁵ Italian forces therefore occupied Albania on Good Friday, 7 April 1939.²⁶ As a consequence, the British cabinet decided, as Duncan reported to Lyons on 12 April 1939, that 'it was urgent we made clear that any interference with Greece or Turkey would not be tolerated.'²⁷ The French had become equally determined on a guarantee for Romania, to which the British also subscribed rather than let a division appear between the two western powers.²⁸ As Donald Cameron Watt has pointed out, western strategy had descended into confusion.²⁹ Rather than the originally contemplated system of mutually supportive diplomatic arrangements, Britain and France had created a set of trilateral pacts, where each beneficiary no longer had any incentive to extend their obligations to their counterparts in the other agreements. With this development, attempts to build a 'peace front' effectively ground to a halt. Desultory talks took place with the Yugoslavs, to little overall effect.³⁰ Hungarian and Bulgarian territorial claims on their neighbours, together with Hungary's adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact, made them difficult negotiating partners. The 'peace front' was, for all practical purposes, dead.

Australia

In Australia, cabinet was meeting as German troops marched into Czecho-Slovakia.³¹ News of the capitulation had been spread across the front pages of the press that morning, opposite details of the resignation of Bob Menzies, the Attorney-General.³² The minutes indicate ministers in fact spent the day clearing the backlog of issues that had built up during the deadlock over National Insurance, whose resolution had triggered the latter event.³³ Although matters covered included items such as a report on recruitment, these were long-standing questions, rather than evidence of a spontaneous reaction to events in Europe. There does not appear to have been any formal discussion of the international situation at this point. Of more import was the decision to establish a committee to consider the amalgamation of the administrations of the Australian territory of Papua with that of the former German colony of New Guinea. While, again, this was a question which had been

²⁵ Watt, *How War Came*, p.209. The Italian action in Albania was counter-productive in this regard. For instance, Te Water, the South African High Commissioner in London, linked it to the Anglo-Polish agreement, thereby depicting Italy as effectively acting in the German interest, rather than demonstrating its independence from Germany, as Ciano intended. See, NASA SAB PM 1/20/1, United Kingdom Foreign Policy, Te Water to Hertzog, 12 April 1939

²⁶ Watt, *How War Came*, p.208

²⁷ NAA A981(4)/GRE A 8 Part 4/Great Britain – Foreign Policy, Duncan to Lyons, 12 April 1939

²⁸ Rothwell, *Origins*, p.104

²⁹ Watt, *How War Came*, pp.213 & 214

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.292-4

³¹ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 15 March 1939

³² See, for instance, *The Argus*, (Melbourne), 15 March 1939, p.1

³³ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 15 March 1939

under consideration for some time, the announcement of this decision to the press, at this time, sent a very clear, public message that Australia remained adamantly opposed to surrendering its mandate to Germany.³⁴

The sudden apparent threat to Romania only increased the tension. Lyons felt compelled to make a statement to the press on Monday, 20 March: that Australia would support Britain in whatever might occur; he remained directly in touch with Chamberlain by telephone; cabinet would meet to discuss the situation the following day; but that while ministers were concerned, there was no reason for panic; and there was no need to recall Parliament before the due date of 19 April.³⁵ The following day, ministers agreed a measure to develop the manufacture of military aircraft for Britain in Australia and a suitably worded statement on international relations for the press.³⁶ London had in the meantime informed Canberra of the disappointing results of its survey of foreign capitals and its intention of inviting the Poles, French and Russians to make a public declaration that they would hold joint consultations over any further aggressive moves.³⁷ The Australian government now echoed the British view releasing a public statement on 22 March that German actions had completely undone the 'Spirit of Munich' and undermined the credibility of Hitler's word.³⁸ They noted the increased tension concerning Romania and expressed support for the steps Britain was now taking to preserve 'peace and security... from further encroachments by force on the freedom and independence of other nations.' Up to this point, the cabinet hawks, like Hughes, had been able to carry the day, delivering a very public snub to Germany by publicising their plans for Papua and New Guinea; raising doubts about Hitler's credibility and expressing support not just for Britain's quest for peace, but also for security and the preservation of 'the freedom and independence of other nations.' This represented a material departure from the 'Spirit of Munich' where the pursuit of peace had been paramount. The doves had been held back by the political impossibility of allowing any distance being seen to develop between London and Canberra, so when the British government adopted a new, more assertive stance, they were obliged to follow suit. When, however, the hawks attempted to go one step further and transform the proposed voluntary national register of manpower into a compulsory one at cabinet on 22 March, the doves rallied and prevented this from

³⁴ See, for instance, *The Argus*, (Melbourne, 16 March 1939), p.1

³⁵ See, for instance, *The Argus*, (Melbourne, 21 March 1939), p.1

³⁶ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 22 March 1939

³⁷ NAA A981(4)/Ger/83/Part 2/German Foreign Policy/Inskip to Dominion Prime Ministers, 21 March 1939

³⁸ See, for instance, *The Argus*, (Melbourne, 22 March 1939), p.1

own.²⁵ Italian forces therefore occupied Albania on Good Friday, 7 April 1939.²⁶ As a consequence, the British cabinet decided, as Duncan reported to Lyons on 12 April 1939, that 'it was urgent we made clear that any interference with Greece or Turkey would not be tolerated.'²⁷ The French had become equally determined on a guarantee for Romania, to which the British also subscribed rather than let a division appear between the two western powers.²⁸ As Donald Cameron Watt has pointed out, western strategy had descended into confusion.²⁹ Rather than the originally contemplated system of mutually supportive diplomatic arrangements, Britain and France had created a set of trilateral pacts, where each beneficiary no longer had any incentive to extend their obligations to their counterparts in the other agreements. With this development, attempts to build a 'peace front' effectively ground to a halt. Desultory talks took place with the Yugoslavs, to little overall effect.³⁰ Hungarian and Bulgarian territorial claims on their neighbours, together with Hungary's adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact, made them difficult negotiating partners. The 'peace front' was, for all practical purposes, dead.

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²⁶ Watt, *How War Came*, p.208

²⁷ NAA A981(4)/GRE 8 Part 4/Great Britain – Foreign Policy, Duncan to Lyons, 12 April 1939

²⁸ Rothwell, *Origins*, p.104

²⁹ Watt, *How War Came*, pp.213 & 214

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.292-4

³¹ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 15 March 1939

³² See, for instance, *The Argus*, (Melbourne), 15 March 1939, p.1

³³ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 15 March 1939

involved no commitment in advance to necessarily resist German expansion.⁴⁶ He was also pessimistic about Romania's prospects, believing that it would eventually succumb to the usual German methods, when the west was distracted elsewhere. He emphasised the importance of Poland in London's plans, noting their reluctance to commit themselves, but repeating the British view that they would fight for their independence. He was concerned about Italian claims against France, but drew comfort from Mussolini's speech, which he believed indicated that Italy had no desire to precipitate a crisis on its own account, and that current Italian disenchantment with the Germans would prevent them doing so at Germany's behest. Hughes was uncharacteristically cautious about proposals from Britain's ambassador in Japan for a more assertive stance against the Japanese, including the despatch of a naval force to Singapore, suggesting that Canberra should seek more information, before deciding whether to support or oppose these.

The following day, 29 March, cabinet met again. This time the minutes show the hawks succeeded in persuading their colleagues that the national register should be made compulsory rather than voluntary, indicating concern about the international situation remained high.⁴⁷ There were, however, still limits to the steps Australia was prepared to take at this point. Brigadier Street, the Minister for Defence, expressed concern that the Australian delegation to the forthcoming Pacific Defence Conference had been given too broad a remit, and successfully persuaded his colleagues to limit the delegates' authority to matters of their own professional competence, rather than issues with broader policy implications. A cable was accordingly sent to Wellington by Lyons advising that the Australians had been instructed to confine themselves to the military aspect of contributing to imperial defence, after having provided for regional security; arrangements for the exchange of information on defence matters, rather than the actual co-ordination of policy as originally specified; and to confine the discussion of the economic aspects of the conduct of war to its implications for shipping only.⁴⁸ He continued that the first two matters belonged to the political arena which was the domain of governments and unfortunately ministerial attendance was impossible in view of the commencement of the forthcoming Parliamentary session on 19 April. The last was simply too complex and involved for discussion in its entirety at the present time. Even at this time, it was preferable these matters were not discussed, than that they were discussed by the wrong people, or that Canberra should have to take the necessary steps to ensure the right people were there.

⁴⁶ NAA A981(4)/Exte 184/External Affairs Department: Cabinet Statements/International Situation, 28 March 1939, p.1

⁴⁷ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 29 March 1939

⁴⁸ NAA A981/4 PAC 1, Lyons to Savage 29 March 1939

In addition, at its 29 March meeting, cabinet considered the agenda for the upcoming Premiers' Conference, the first since the abortive attempt to co-ordinate state and federal defence and development policy.⁴⁹ This was due to meet that Friday, 31 March. Page was very much the driving force behind the government's strategy on this issue. In January, he had therefore dismissed a Military Board report into state co-operation with the defence department as inadequate, because 'it is obvious that the whole question of future industrial development and location of industries and their strategic value never entered their heads.'⁵⁰ He had managed to persuade the Prime Minister to let him head up a cabinet sub-committee to consider the issue.⁵¹ He had despaired of obtaining voluntary state collaboration with his plans after the meeting of 21 October and so had recommended that Canberra impose co-operation on the states through the appointment of a 'Co-ordination Czar', who was to be given the authority to compel the states to work together with the national government.⁵² A decision on this was still pending and at the 29 March cabinet, Page revisited his arguments in favour in a five page proposal.⁵³ In the end, however, cabinet would decide to proceed with not one but two appointees, one for works and one for supply and development.⁵⁴ The conference itself met in a changed atmosphere from the one five months previously. This time, meeting in the knowledge of Britain's guarantee to Poland, there could be no question of the continuing seriousness of the international situation, and the state premiers accordingly now offered no resistance to Canberra's proposals.⁵⁵

As seen in chapter one, Lyons's sudden death on Friday 7 April only exacerbated the divisions within the Australian governing coalition. In the short term, he was succeeded by Page, while the larger U.A.P. arranged to elect a new leader, who would then take over the government in the longer term. Understandably enough, the concurrent Italian action in Albania was overshadowed by the domestic considerations arising from the unexpected death of a serving prime minister and there appears to have been no cabinet discussion of the invasion according to the minutes of their meeting on 7 April.⁵⁶ Cabinet next met in Melbourne on 14 April, in the wake of the guarantees to Greece and Romania, and agreed a

⁴⁹ See Chapter Two, above.

⁵⁰ NLA *Page Papers* (MS1633) Folder 584, Page to Lyons, 4 January 1939

⁵¹ NLA *Page Papers* (MS1633) Folder 584, Lyons to Page, 10 January 1939

⁵² NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, Page, Sir Earle, memorandum dated 6 February 1939

'Co-ordination of Development and Defence'

⁵³ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, Page, Sir Earle, memorandum dated 28 March 1939

'Defence and Development', pp.1-5

⁵⁴ NAA A2694 Vol.19, Part II, Cabinet Minutes, 3-4 April 1939

⁵⁵ NAA, A9504/1/4/Premiers' Conferences: 1933 - '46/Proceedings, 31 March 1939, p.11

⁵⁶ NAA A2694 Vol.20, Cabinet Minutes, 7 April 1939

statement for the press on the international situation.⁵⁷ This indicated that they felt 'no immediate anxiety.' Ministers were relaxed enough 'to disperse for the weekend.' Page, however, did go to Canberra, 'so that he could keep in touch with the situation.' Ministers would also remain on call in case of need. These reassurances aside, the statement was vintage Hughes. The Minister for External Affairs described conditions as 'grave, but not critical.' He noted that Germany and Italy had both publicly denied having any plans for further aggressive moves, and that the western powers and their allies certainly had no such designs. He could not, however, pass up the opportunity for pouring further scorn on the dictators' trustworthiness: 'unfortunately, however, events of the last few months have convinced statesmen that words, most solemn protestations, pacts and agreements count for nothing.' He returned to his most fundamental belief: only one thing counted, 'force resolutely arrayed to resist aggression.' This, he rather over-optimistically indicated, was what Britain was doing with its policy of guarantees to potential victims of aggression. He claimed to detect signs that this was already working in the dictators' words, by 'reading between the lines.' This would lead, not to peace by acquiescence, 'but peace with security.' Mussolini, for instance, had now reassured Lord Halifax he had no aggressive intentions toward Greece. Characteristically, however, Hughes ended on an ominous note. The Italian dictator's actions to date had been fundamentally irreconcilable with the Anglo-Italian Agreement and Europe itself was 'strewn with tinder heaps from the east to the west.' The international situation's defining feature was its instability.

Cabinet met again on the following Monday. External affairs were again discussed and the minutes show it was agreed that Hughes and the Treasurer, Casey, draw up a White Paper on international relations.⁵⁸ In fact, by the time it was prepared Casey's name had been dropped and the contents appeared to be more in line with the views of the Minister for External Affairs.⁵⁹ It acknowledged the revolutionary nature of the latest transformation in British foreign policy, but insisted on the continuity in purpose behind it. Appeasement had required 'a corresponding contribution from the other side.' This had not been forthcoming and consequently a new policy with the same objective had become necessary. It argued German actions since September increasingly indicated an intention to dominate the world through the threat of force, citing *Kristallnacht*'s demonstration of how entrenched extremism was in Berlin; the accelerated pace of German rearmament; and the consequent economic

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14 April 1939; for the substance of this statement, see, for instance, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (Sydney), 15 April 1939, p.11

⁵⁸ NAA A2694 Vol.20, Cabinet Minutes, 17 April 1939

⁵⁹ W.M Hughes, *Review of the International Situation: September 1938 - April 1939*, (Canberra, 1939).

distortions powering hegemonic tendencies in Germany's external commercial arrangements. Italy had only added to the tension with its claims on France and build-up of troops in Africa. The public solidarity demonstrated by the western powers had, however, rallied international confidence. German moves in Czecho-Slovakia and Italian ones in Albania had, however, thrown Europe into further disarray. In its continuing quest to preserve peace, Britain, together with France, had therefore embarked on the creation of an anti-aggression coalition and, in the face of reported immediate threats to their security, had in the meantime guaranteed Poland, Romania and Greece as interim measures until this bloc could be properly established. Australia fully supported this as its interests were bound up with Britain's not just in the Far and Near East and the Mediterranean, but also in Europe. Equally, as a small and vulnerable nation, Australia had an interest in preserving itself against domination by the threat of force.

Hughes had been able to use the events of March and April to assert his control over external affairs policy as never before. The cabinet doves, led by Lyons were placed on the back foot by Prague and Memel. They also succumbed to the necessity of endorsing the new, assertive British policy, lest they allow any distance to appear between London and Canberra. In the circumstances, it was only a matter of time before the hawks succeeded in converting the proposed register of national manpower from a voluntary to a compulsory one. Lyons's death, as the Italians marched into Albania, left the doves leaderless as well as rudderless. Under Page, Hughes had even greater freedom. Having conceded war was not immediately imminent, he took the opportunity to disparage the dictators' credibility and to promote his fundamental belief that force needed to be met with force. Page did impose Casey, the leading remaining dove, on Hughes, in a bid to temper down the White Paper to be produced on external affairs, but this does not appear to have worked. Casey's name does not appear and the contents were typical of Hughes, condemning the dictators and building British efforts up into much more than they actually were. Casey's support for appeasement had been largely motivated by loyalty to Lyons and the desire to obtain his endorsement in the succession stakes. With the latter gone, the Treasurer was free to follow his own, more hawkish instincts.⁶⁰ He was also intensely involved in the intrigues following Lyons's death and therefore had little time to master external affairs as well. Hughes was likewise actively conspiring to divert the succession in his interests, but external affairs was his portfolio, so he did not need extra time to bring himself up to speed with the issues. His dominance was not, however, to last. Having been elected leader of the U.A.P. on 18 April, Menzies was

⁶⁰ See Chapter One, above.

determined to remove his rivals from positions of importance, so Casey was relegated from the Treasury to the newly created, and politically peripheral, Ministry of Supply, while Hughes was reduced to Attorney-General, with the largely cosmetic office of Deputy Prime Minister as a sop. Sir Henry Gullett was the new Minister for External Affairs and, as the British High Commissioner put it, 'no one listens to Gullett.'⁶¹ Politically, Menzies might have to accept the continuance of his rivals in cabinet, but he intended to make sure his was the dominant voice in international relations.

South Africa

In South Africa, Hertzog had publicly paraded his faith in an enduring peace in Europe as late as Friday, 10 March, while Smuts, had, in contrast, remained overcome by pessimism.⁶² The latter wrote to Margaret Gillett on 17 March that Prague had confirmed his worst fears even faster than he had expected.⁶³ He continued that Hertzog and Chamberlain's optimistic belief in an enduring European peace based on a position of strength had been completely discredited by the latest of Hitler's 'stunning blows.' Chamberlain's reaction had been 'feeble.' Prophetically, Smuts expected Italy now to make the next move, although after the Spanish victory, as Mussolini 'would not be satisfied to be a mere onlooker while Germany swallows all the feast in Central Europe.' However, Smuts could not bring himself to accept that force had to be 'the last word on our side too.' Te Water was likewise pessimistic, reporting to Hertzog on 16 March that public opinion in Britain had 'hardened almost overnight.'⁶⁴ He continued that he anticipated a chorus of pacificatory public statements but reiterated that the pace of armaments continued to be the true gauge of international tension.

Hertzog reverted to silence. The apparent threat to Romania, London's canvassing of other capitals in response to this and the disappointing outcome to that process produced no reaction.⁶⁵ On Tuesday, 21 March, Inskip advised dominion Prime Ministers that the British government had decided to approach the French, Polish and Russian governments with the proposal that the four publicly declare that, in the event of another act of aggression, they would consult each other as to how to react.⁶⁶ This was too much for Te Water and, the same

⁶¹ TNA DO 35 121/46 Sir Geoffrey Whiskard, British High Commissioner in Canberra, to Inskip, 19 June 1939

⁶² See previous chapter.

⁶³ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246, Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 17 March 1939

⁶⁴ NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78) Vol.13, Correspondence, Te Water to Hertzog, 16 March 1939

⁶⁵ NASA SAB/BLO/117/PS/5/1/1, Vol.2, High Commissioner London Correspondence, Te Water to Hertzog, 21 March 1939

⁶⁶ NAA A981(4)/Ger/83/Part 2/German Foreign Policy/Inskip to Dominion Prime Ministers, 21 March 1939

day, sought his chief's intervention, asking 'cannot our voice be raised against what surely can only be described as the defeatist policies at present governing situation.'⁶⁷ This had the desired effect. On 23 March, Hertzog sent Te Water a message for delivery to the British government, urging them not to abandon appeasement.⁶⁸ The South African Prime Minister, drawing on a warning from Dr. Gie, also expressed the hope that the proposed four power declaration would not amount to the encirclement of Germany, as this would mean war, 'not because Germany necessarily wants war, but because such policy of encirclement cannot be taken by her as meaning anything else.'⁶⁹ The General reinforced this message with the words 'that Germany would be entitled to so interpret such a policy, I do not think anyone can doubt.' Rather desperately, he warned that this would throw the responsibility for any such conflict onto Britain and her allies and would cost them the goodwill that they had gained as a result of Hitler's treatment of Czecho-Slovakia. Hertzog concluded ominously 'in the Union of South Africa, the results of such policy will be decidedly most regrettable.' Chamberlain, however, successfully reassured Te Water that this was not what was intended, which the latter duly reported to his chief on 24 March.⁷⁰

The same day, Gie reported to his government on the German view, which he feared might be overlooked, 'as intense indignation regarding the incorporation of Czecho-Slovakia is so widespread and so understandable.'⁷¹ Gie took Hitler and the dynamic character of National Socialism as given, but argued the regime also feared being encircled and subjected to a blockade, and was therefore obsessed with external criticism of, and counter-measures to, its actions. Berlin's response to this perceived vulnerability was to engage in a "*Drang nach Osten*." Public opinion supported Hitler over this policy's most recent manifestation in the Prague episode, but was somewhat subdued on account of the British reaction; nevertheless, there was widespread resentment, not least because of its perceived hypocrisy, about the latter's interference in Germany's eastern "*lebensraum*." The unstated implication was that Germany should continue to be treated with understanding, whether in spite of, or because of, their appalling behaviour.

Back home, also on 23 March, Hertzog strove for unity, stating in the House, even as Hitler seized Memel; that 'our relations with all other nations were still friendly and peaceful, and

⁶⁷ NASA SAB/BLO/117/PS/5/1/1, Vol.2, High Commissioner London Correspondence, Te Water to Hertzog, 21 March 1939

⁶⁸ NASA SAB/BLO/117/PS/5/1/1, Vol.2, High Commissioner London Correspondence, Aide Memoire of a message from General Hertzog to His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom on the European situation, 23 March 1939

⁶⁹ NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12, German Foreign Policy, Gie to Hertzog, 22 March 1939

⁷⁰ NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78) Vol.13, Correspondence, Te Water to Hertzog, 24 March 1939

⁷¹ NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78) Vol.13, Correspondence, Gie to Hertzog, 23 March 1939

that it would be best to remember we still had no enemy.⁷² Ostensibly this remark favoured the *Afrikaner* predilection for neutrality by reminding the public that, as yet, South Africa had no *casus belli* with anyone. Anglophones could scarcely object to this, however, as Britain had yet to go beyond a proposal to bind themselves to consult with other parties in the face of fresh aggression. The use of the word 'still', as the *Cape Times* pointed out, also implied this might not always be the case. Hertzog even went on to declare that 'the moment might undoubtedly arise when South Africa would feel herself involved.' Again, although seeming to appeal to Anglophones, this actually reached out to both sections. The phrasing was conditional, so *Afrikaners* could take comfort from the idea that this might never actually come to fruition. Hertzog had to be circumspect in what he said in order to keep all his supporters in line.

Smuts writing to his friend Margaret Gillett the following day, 24 March, had no need to concern himself with unity. Nor was he much troubled by Hitler's acquisition of Memel, although he expressed sympathy for European alarm at the episode.⁷³ The South African Deputy Prime Minister remained fixated on Italy and Italian involvement in Spain. He expected, quite correctly as it turned out, that Mussolini would soon have to make a move as 'surely he cannot remain naked and hungry while his partner has this gargantuan feast. [*sic*]' His instincts, however, wrongly led him to surmise that this would be focused on Spain, leading him to once again condemn what he saw as the supine inaction of the western powers in the face of blatant German and Italian intervention there.

The weekend remained quiet and it was not until Tuesday, 28 March, that Whitehall completely shared its anxieties about German intentions with the dominions, in a cable which predicted the Germans would first absorb Poland and Romania, before, their rear secured, turning on the western powers.⁷⁴ Two days later Inskip advised the dominion prime ministers of Chamberlain's intention to guarantee Poland.⁷⁵ Also that day in Berlin, Dr. Gie prepared a report for the Union government on the crisis, which he arranged to have sent to London for onward transmission for security reasons.⁷⁶ In a covering letter to Te Water he considered that his analysis had been 'completely frank, perhaps too frank.' He concluded 'things look bad.'

⁷² NASA *Hertzog Papers* (A32) Vol.144, Hertzog, J. B. M. as cited in *Cape Times*, 24 March 1939

⁷³ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246, Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 24 March 1939

⁷⁴ NASA SAB BTS 1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Inskip to Dominion Prime Ministers, Circular Telegram B No. 122, 28 March 1939

⁷⁵ NAA A981(4)/GER 67 Part 1/Germany – Relations with Poland, SSFDA to dominion Prime Ministers, 30 March 1939

⁷⁶ NASA SAB/BLO/117/PS/5/1/1, Vol.2, High Commissioner London Correspondence, Gie to Te Water, 31 March 1939

His report was openly critical of Hitler. Gie deemed the latter's actions had revealed the scope of the problem, as without warning Europe might find itself landed in a war and there was nothing South Africa could do about it. The German leader had violated his own tenet of racial purity and revealed other peoples as potential victims of his restless ambition. Having denounced Hitler, Gie then started to backtrack. Firstly, he stressed the mystical and legalistic aspects to the seizure of Prague, creating the impression that there might, after all, be some self-imposed limits to Hitler's appetite. Secondly, Gie focused his concern on London and one man in particular, Halifax. That this man was British Foreign Secretary at this time was '*n tragedie*' [a tragedy]. His lack of pragmatism evidenced in his moral sermonising and premature talk of a Russian agreement had set Britain on a collision course with Germany. Hitler's previous successes, together with Halifax's failed alliance proposal and British reluctance to adopt conscription, had combined to create a dangerous prospect, where Germany had become incapable of moderation, whether confronted with either checks or successes. If the German leader was bent on early hostilities, it was because he had become convinced war was inevitable and wished to take advantage of the current German lead in armaments. Gie would not welcome German rule over South Africa but he could not understand why Britain was not prepared to leave Germany a free hand in the East, unless they were bent on a preventative war, in which case others had the right to look to their own interests. Gie's message remained the same as previously, that Britain should continue to treat Germany sympathetically in the interests of peace and, ultimately, South African unity.

Te Water reassured Gie on the question of his frankness that his despatches from Berlin 'were most illuminating and will be so to General Hertzog, too.'⁷⁷ In his own covering letter to the South African Prime Minister, the High Commissioner in London largely agreed with Gie's views.⁷⁸ However, he thought the new direction in British foreign policy was as much Chamberlain's doing as it was Halifax's. He was also markedly more sympathetic to the British position, remarking 'I confess to finding it extremely difficult to conceive of any other action than that taken by Great Britain to meet German action.' However, 'nothing could be more dangerous than the present situation.' He was therefore urging London not to allow the situation to spiral out of control: 'the pacific intentions of this country must, I believe, be demonstrated by some action which will give Germany and Italy a chance to prove theirs.' His suggestion was that Chamberlain should offer Germany and Italy a non-aggression pact at the point when the peace front came together. He described the mood in

⁷⁷ NASA SAB/BLO/117/PS/5/1/1, Vol.2, High Commissioner London Correspondence, Te Water to Gie, 4 April 1939

⁷⁸ NASA SAB/BLO/117/PS/5/1/1, Vol.2, High Commissioner London Correspondence, Te Water to Hertzog, 4 April 1939

Parliament and the country as settled, after the agony of indecision which had been faced, and warned bleakly: 'if Germany takes action again, it will be the end. There will be war.'

On the eve of Mussolini's march into Albania, Smuts wrote again to Margaret Gillett.⁷⁹ The revolutionary nature of Chamberlain's guarantee to Poland had shocked Smuts and his colleagues; it 'has simply made us gasp.' Firstly, there was alarm at how the volatile German regime would react to this attempt to check their aggressive march. Secondly, he worried what effect this latest move would have on the future of the Commonwealth. The dangers were 'obvious.' Smuts feared that Chamberlain's action would only magnify the centrifugal forces pulling the British 'family of nations' in different directions. He remained deeply pessimistic about the prospects for peace, writing to his friend again on 8 April, how 'our frail barque is tossing on the heaving waters of unprovoked aggression.'⁸⁰ He worried that Albania would only be the first of Mussolini's moves, as 'it is too small a beginning to satisfy so great a greed.'

This latest aggression, occurring as it did on Good Friday, caused considerable confusion. On Tuesday 11 April, Te Water reported to Hertzog that the situation had 'been too fluid for a High Commissioners' meeting over the Easter weekend.'⁸¹ One was summoned the next day, and immediately afterwards the South African informed his government of what had transpired there.⁸² He had found British denials that Italian action had been in response to the signature of the Anglo-Polish Agreement the previous week unconvincing. He reported the good news that Mussolini appeared anxious not to burn his bridges, however, and that British reaction was being minimised for pragmatic reasons. He also reported that the proposed guarantee to Greece was to be on similar lines to the Polish one. The decision to likewise guarantee Romania was not known at that point.

The same day, Hertzog refused the Opposition a debate in Parliament on the international situation, stating in the House, 'it would be unwise for members to discuss matters about which they knew nothing, and which did not concern them.'⁸³ Actually, as Dr. Malan retorted, it was to avoid exposing the divisions in his party.⁸⁴ Sir William Clark, the British High Commissioner, concurred with this latter view in his report to London on 13 April.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Clark detected a significant shift in Hertzog's thinking. He related that Hertzog

⁷⁹ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246, Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 6 April 1939

⁸⁰ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol. 246, Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 8 April 1939

⁸¹ NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78) Vol.13, Correspondence, Te Water to Hertzog, 11 April 1939

⁸² NASA *Te Water Papers* (A78) Vol.13, Correspondence, Te Water to Hertzog, 12 April 1939

⁸³ NASA/*Hertzog Papers* (A32)/144/Hertzog, J. B. M. as cited in *Cape Times*, 13/4/39

⁸⁴ *Idem*.

⁸⁵ NAGB/DO/35/576/706/137/Clark, Sir William to Dominions Office, 13 April 1939

had told him: 'how opinion had been largely sympathetic to Germany after the Treaty of Versailles, how it was shaken by the September affair and how the last attack on Czechoslovakia was bringing the conviction that Hitler's real aim was world domination.' Sir William felt Hertzog was actually describing his own journey rather than that of public opinion. Hertzog had even gone so far as to say 'if Hitler launched another of his attacks, conversion of public opinion in South Africa would be complete and people would realise that they had no option but to range themselves on our side in the event of war.'

The guarantees to Romania and Greece were not the last word on the repercussions from Prague as far as Pretoria was concerned. According to Pirow in *Hertzog*, Smuts had told the Prime Minister that there were German plans afoot to stage a rising in South West-Africa on Hitler's birthday.⁸⁶ Smuts confirmed this in a letter of 18 April to Margaret Gillett: 'we have had warnings from various reliable sources that we may expect sudden trouble in S.W. Africa.'⁸⁷ The police were therefore taken under direct South African control and reinforcements despatched from the Union.⁸⁸ Hertzog was as intent as Smuts on not surrendering South-West Africa and gave the move his full backing in Parliament.⁸⁹ The Prime Minister justified the Union takeover of the police in South West Africa by reference to Axis moves in Europe. The march into Prague cast long shadows.

By this point, Smuts appeared convinced that war was coming, having written in his letter to Margaret Gillett on 18 April: 'I believe the stage is set for a world conflict and the Dictators are determined to go forward.'⁹⁰ Smuts continued that he was writing just before going to a meeting at Groote Schuur [the Prime Minister's residence] to discuss 'the war situation.' While Smuts did not indicate what had occurred there, there was no repetition of the reservations he had expressed over the guarantee to Poland endangering the relationship of Britain and the dominions. Indeed, he freely used the words 'we' and 'our' when talking of the Commonwealth, as for instance in the remark: 'if we are not extra careful, the result may be that a sudden attack is made on Suez and Egypt, with very serious dangers to one of our

⁸⁶ Pirow, *Hertzog*, pp.242-3 Pirow implies Smuts fabricated the threat to create an incident that would harden *Afrikaner* opinion against Germany. No evidence of such a plot emerged after the police were despatched to Windhoek, so this may be true, but Hertzog's acquiescence in the despatch of police reinforcements, and his subsequent support for the takeover of the local police by South Africa would suggest either that he displayed an uncharacteristic lack of interest in the issue, or that he was in the know. Certainly, the measures had the beneficial side-effect of publicly demonstrating the government's commitment to maintaining control over South-West Africa, which would have supplied sufficient motive for both generals.

⁸⁷ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol.246, Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 18 April 1939

⁸⁸ NASA *Hertzog Papers* (A32) Vol.144, Hertzog, J. B. M., as cited in *Cape Times*, 21 April 1939

⁸⁹ *Idem*.

⁹⁰ NASA *Smuts Papers* (A1) Vol.246, Correspondence, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 16 April 1939

principal lines of communication.’ All of which seemed entirely consistent with what Hertzog had told Sir William Clark. Superficially, the United Party appeared to have overcome its internal divisions and looked as if it was ready to commit itself to a war at Britain’s side against aggression, even if it was not ready to go public with this decision.

The key to this apparent unity was the continuing mutual interest of Hertzog and Smuts in preserving their ‘Fusion’ experiment.⁹¹ Both of them had sunk too much into this to readily abandon it. Immediately prior to Prague, Hertzog was publicly upbeat, while Smuts was privately pessimistic about the prospects for peace, but did not mean that either of them had shifted in their commitment to fusing the English and *Afrikaner* communities into one. Hitler’s subsequent move into Prague and the British response to it severely increased international tension, and thereby strained party unity, but without providing an opening for the South Africans to influence. London’s proposal for a mutual public commitment to even just consult in the event of fresh aggression, however, was a step too far. There was a danger this would lead the Germans to conclude they were being ‘encircled’, driving them to lash out in an act of desperation, thereby threatening the South African government’s unity. Hertzog would not enter such a war and this would split his party, ending the ‘Fusion’ experiment in which Smuts, as well as the Prime Minister, had invested so much. Hertzog therefore spoke for his colleague too, when he pushed the British not to close the door on negotiations with Germany in his message of 24 March. Similarly, Smuts also spoke for Hertzog, when he told Margaret Gillett on 6 April of South African shock at the Polish guarantee and expressed concern at its implications for the future of the Commonwealth. The Italian invasion of Albania changed all this. It appeared the Axis were working in collusion, which drew in South African interests, constituting a threat to ‘our’ lines of communication through the Mediterranean and Suez. Hertzog and Smuts were also united on retaining South Africa’s mandate over South-West Africa, and the former therefore backed the latter in his moves to strengthen the hands of the Union’s authorities there. The continuing fragility of this public unity, however, can be discerned from the Prime Minister’s refusal to grant the Opposition a debate on the international situation, as this could expose how divided his party remained. Even his government’s unity on the issue remained limited, agreed on attempting to prevent an outbreak of war, but only in accord thereafter if the Axis were acting in unison.

⁹¹ See Chapter One, above.

According to his diary, Mackenzie King spent the period of 11 – 14 March preoccupied with trying to extend his prospective role in the forthcoming royal tour of North America, and therefore took no account of the initial cable from London, on Saturday 11 March, warning of the impending crisis.⁹² He did not give any attention to Czecho-Slovakia until 15 March, when Hitler was in Prague. The Canadian leader recorded his immediate reaction to the actual invasion in his diary as being that the ‘war scare’ of the preceding months had in fact been a carefully planned diversion, meant to distract attention from what was actually intended.⁹³ Prague only reinforced the personal significance of Hitler in Mackenzie King’s worldview. He continued ‘it would almost seem as if Hitler had had a charmed life.’ The German leader was ‘a man of destiny, if ever there was one.’ Given Mackenzie King’s belief in the active intervention of spiritual forces in worldly affairs and the value of personal contact in political matters, the importance of maintaining a dialogue with the German leader was inescapable. This did not mean that the Canadian endorsed Hitler and his acts; as he went on to argue instead that Gandhi would have greater long-term influence. Nevertheless, Mackenzie King was not yet ready to abandon appeasement, despite German aggression, as ‘anything, however, is better than war.’

Chamberlain’s Birmingham speech on Friday, 17 March brought home the seriousness of the situation. Mackenzie King noted in his journal that the British Prime Minister’s line on Hitler had changed, both due to the breach of faith involved in taking Prague, and the ambition implied in the subjugation of non-Germans.⁹⁴ Chamberlain’s enumeration of the assets Germany had acquired in so doing filled the Canadian leader with gloom. What really horrified him, however, was the British leader’s remark that he would not give up liberty to obtain peace and that ‘he felt that the Dominions [*sic*] were behind Britain in this.’ The problem for the Canadian Prime Minister was the mention of the dominions. As far as Mackenzie King was concerned, this ‘immediately raises the most difficult question with which we are faced in Parliament.’ The ‘jingoos’ would pull him in one way and the *Quebecois* in another, threatening the country’s unity.

It was not until the morning of Monday, 20 March, that the Prime Minister turned to drafting a statement to be made that afternoon on Canada’s position. He felt this was necessary after Chamberlain’s speech, noting in his diary that the public rightly expected

⁹² King, *Diary*, 11 – 14 March 1939

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 15 March 1939, p.2

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17 March 1939, p.3

him 'to display solidarity with the other democracies in countering aggression and attempts to dominate 'the world by force.'⁹⁵ However, he remained concerned by the implications that Chamberlain's remark about dominion support for Britain had created and, hence, was anxious to avoid 'any blank cheque to any Administration in Britain to involve us in war anywhere the British Government might wish to participate in conflict.' He remained ambivalent about Hitler, feeling the latter's word could no longer be trusted, but seemingly more concerned that the volatility of the Balkan region might now unleash an uncontrollable chain reaction, as in 1914. This was only reinforced by the news from London that Britain was surveying European capitals about Romania, which drew forth the comment 'what a hideous business that Europe should be again at the verge of war over trouble in these Balkan areas.' He was clearly apprehensive about how cabinet would receive his statement on international relations and recorded his determination 'to stand by this point of view, above outlined, regardless of consequences.'

He need not have worried. Very much to his surprise, he found his cabinet, including Lapointe, were in broad agreement with him. As has been seen, Mackenzie King's *Quebecois* lieutenant had previously acted as a brake on the Prime Minister's participationist tendencies. Lapointe had clearly softened his former stance, however, as the only objections raised at the meeting were that Mackenzie King's statement did not go far enough and the Minister of Justice even agreed later to the insertion of a sentence 'concerning the menace to the Commonwealth from an unprovoked attack on London.' The following day, as Mackenzie King confided in his diary, Lapointe again showed his change of heart by admitting that, although the stance would be unpopular in Quebec, 'it could not be helped.'⁹⁶ The Prime Minister could therefore now look forward to taking a united government along with him.

Campbell reported to London on 21 March, that Mackenzie King had mentioned in passing in the House as part of his statement on international affairs that his government was ready to enter into 'consultation with the United Kingdom.'⁹⁷ That the Canadian Prime Minister did not attach any particular significance to this remark can be deduced from its absence from his diary; either in the section where he enumerated the points he needed to include in his speech, or in the section covering the discussion of the statement in cabinet.⁹⁸ It was of

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20 March 1939

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21 March 1939, p.4

⁹⁷ King, as cited in TNA DO 35, 576/706/109, Cable from High Commissioner, Ottawa to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 21 March 1939, No.74

⁹⁸ King, *Diary*, 20 March 1939, pp.1-2

great significance, however, to Whitehall, where the Canadian Prime Minister's view had long been held to be the polar opposite. In March 1938, for instance, the then Dominions Secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, had advised that: 'any suggestion on our part that we had "consulted", or intended to "consult" with the dominions would call forth some sort of rejoinder from him.'⁹⁹ Already sensitive to this issue, Sir Gerald Campbell cabled the Dominions Office on 21 March delicately implying that there might be consequences for remarks now made by Lord Halifax in the House of Lords that London was already in "close and practical consultation" with the Dominions.'¹⁰⁰ Whitehall responded the following day that, if asked, Sir Gerald should reply that London was committed to keeping dominion governments fully informed and they were free to provide comments if they wished to do so, which was what had been meant by "consultation."¹⁰¹ The Dominions Office remained intrigued by Mackenzie King's remarks, however, and Campbell was therefore also instructed to enquire what, if anything, the Canadian leader had meant by them.

Sir Gerald would not get the opportunity to do so until Friday, 24 March. In the interim, Hitler had swallowed Memel, which inspired the comment in Mackenzie King's diary: 'I hate the thought of great Powers being brought into wars over wretched little states.'¹⁰² The Canadian Prime Minister went on that he much preferred the situation where 'four men in one place had everything in their own hands.' He believed the current state of affairs was much more volatile than the previous September, as an outbreak in any remote location might draw in all the countries of Europe; a concern he repeated to his party's caucus on 23 March.¹⁰³ The following day, 24 March, he recorded how his anxieties about the European situation were only reinforced by news of resolutions in the Ontario and Quebec parliaments, respectively pushing Ottawa in favour of unconditional participation and neutrality in any war, in the day's diary entry.¹⁰⁴ This led him to conclude gloomily that 'the country is becoming roused.' European problems were now overtly encroaching on the domestic harmony by which he set such store.

With this in mind, the Prime Minister met the British High Commissioner later that day, recording the proceedings in his diary. As instructed and without explicitly referring to Lord Halifax, Sir Gerald explained to the Canadian leader that the British government considered

⁹⁹ TNA DO 35, 576/F/706/48, Memorandum by Malcolm MacDonald, 23 March 1938, p.5

¹⁰⁰ TNA DO35/576/706/110, Campbell to Dominions Office, 21 March 1939

¹⁰¹ TNA DO35/576/706/110, Dominions Office to Campbell, 22 March 1939

¹⁰² King, *Diary*, 21 March 1939, p.3

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 23 March 1939, p.2

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 March 1939.

all messages amounted to consultation, as dominion governments were welcome to express their opinions, if they chose to do so, on the matters raised in such communications. In fact, Mackenzie King does not appear to have been at all perturbed by the British Foreign Secretary's observations, neither directly raising them in this encounter, nor commenting on them at the time in his diary.¹⁰⁵ Instead he used the meeting with Campbell to set out how he wished to see the system working: firstly, he wished all important communications to be delivered directly from government to government and not via High Commissioners; secondly, that if London wished to consult Ottawa on a particular issue, it should say so explicitly; and thirdly that Whitehall should give prior notice of this and any other sensitive matter via Sir Gerald, so that the Canadian government would have the opportunity of advising against their formal despatch, in case they were controversial, or likely to be refused. This did indeed represent something of an advance from the Prime Minister's former opposition to consultation under any circumstances, but it was evident he was still uncomfortable with the concept. In particular, he insisted the question of a military alliance would be 'embarrassing.' With Ontario and Quebec already roused, the last thing the Canadian leader wanted was to receive a question, where every potential answer could only exacerbate domestic divisions.

The following day, he confided in his diary that that morning he had had 'a very distinct vision of a number of children who were sliding up and down the slope of a roof.'¹⁰⁶ Some came close to the edge, but none fell off. He proceeded to analyse this episode in some detail. At first he felt that the vision was suggestive of danger, but did not feel able to link it to any specific threat. Later, in conversation 'quite involuntarily there came to my lips the expression that the nations were like children sliding on a roof.' He decided that this was what his vision had represented and that it showed that nothing particularly terrible was about to happen, at least for the moment. France and Italy were so close to each other that war would inevitably mean their mutual destruction, 'and that, they will not wish to do.' He also felt the French would be held back by their relative weakness *vis-à-vis* Germany. He did not, however, mention any constraints which might apply in the case of the latter. The understanding appeared to be that peace was only threatened by the spectre of French resistance to German demands and, so long as this did not materialise, war could continue to be avoided. Appeasement therefore remained very much alive and well, at least in his head.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 20-24 March 1939; Mackenzie King was not slow to complain in his diary when he felt aggrieved, for instance, spending 7 pages on 11 March 1939 objecting to his treatment by Palace Officials in connection with the upcoming Royal Tour, *Ibid.*, 11 March 1939, pp.1-7

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 March 1939, p.1

Over the weekend and the following week he worked on a second statement on international affairs, to be delivered on 30 March. His diary reveals how domestic tensions mounted as he worked on it: Manion, the Opposition leader played to the *Quebecois* gallery by repudiating conscription on behalf of the Conservatives; the resolution on participation moved through the Quebec legislature and students from Laval University organised a demonstration against conscription.¹⁰⁷ The Canadian Prime Minister duly made his statement on the 30th, and Sir Gerald Campbell reported on its contents for London's benefit in his despatch home of 31 March.¹⁰⁸ Firstly, Mackenzie King had reviewed the events of the previous year, defending his silence in September, paying tribute to Chamberlain's efforts to preserve peace and condemning recent German activity. He had declared the impossibility of making binding commitments, pointing out that the situation was constantly changing and insisting that any decision would have to take a number of factors into view; Canada's growing sense of identity and her own interests, her position on the North American continent and consequent relationship with the United States (although any suggestion of Pan-American union was premature) and her ties with Britain. He had returned to Sir Wilfrid Laurier's remark about Canada being liable to attack when Britain was engaged in war; explaining this did not mean automatic participation, but that an attack on Britain would inevitably endanger Canada. He had wished to avoid misleading an aggressor into thinking Canada would never fight through premature talk of neutrality. He had referred to the need to co-ordinate activity with others, but had given the necessary pledge on conscription, assuring his audience that his government considered it neither essential nor effective to compel men to serve overseas. Writing in his diary afterwards, the Prime Minister felt both that his audience had been appreciative and that he had performed well, although he conceded that the subsequent speech by Manion, the Leader of the Opposition might well play better with the public.¹⁰⁹ He consoled himself that at least it indicated that the political nation was largely united with regard to the current international position.

That evening, the cable from London announcing the British government's decision to guarantee Poland, subject to consultation with Paris and Warsaw, but not the dominions, arrived. The primary Canadian reaction to this slight was relief. Mackenzie King disliked the measure itself, describing it in his diary as yet another example of 'the sort of bungling way the situation has been handled by England in the last few days.'¹¹⁰ He continued that it, 'I know, will antagonize Hitler tremendously.' The Canadian was also uncertain of its deterrent

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 March 1939, p.1.

¹⁰⁸ TNA DO35/576/706/121, Campbell to Dominions Office, 31 March 1939

¹⁰⁹ King, *Diary*, 30 March 1939, p.2

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 March 1939, p.3

effect, 'after Britain has failed to get other smaller states into line, and has hummed and hawed with Russia.' The next day's entry noted his view that 'a conditional declaration of war was made certainly without anything in the nature of consultation with Canada or any of the dominions.'¹¹¹ His personal reaction was that: 'I am mighty glad that my speech was made yesterday before this particular declaration was made.' He did not, therefore, seek to retract anything that he had said; he was merely thankful he had said it before the message was received. Nor was there any record in his diary of an attempt at cabinet that day to rein in Lapointe, who was due to speak in the afternoon.¹¹²

Lapointe in fact delivered a rousing speech largely directed at the *Quebecois*, as Sir Gerald Campbell dutifully reported to London on 2 April.¹¹³ The Minister for Justice asked rhetorically if any could deny the Prime Minister's view that if bombs were falling on London, public opinion would overwhelmingly demand intervention; demanding if they wished to repudiate Canada's contractual obligations in connection with shipping; and inquiring whether the reliance on the protection of allies did not involve a commensurate obligation to assist such allies in their time of need. Mackenzie King acknowledged in his diary that Lapointe had made the better speech, now regretted that he himself had not been more forthright in his support of Britain, but consoled himself that by each making the speech they had: 'we have built a substantial support for Canadian unity.'¹¹⁴ The Canadian Prime Minister continued to be supportive of Britain and enjoy the newly won support of Lapointe in so doing.

Mackenzie King's belief in the stance he had adopted grew over the period leading up to Easter, judging by his diary entries. Hitler's speech at Wilhelmshaven on 1st April brought the Prime Minister little comfort, but he continued to believe war could be avoided in 1939.¹¹⁵ He felt vindicated, despite the Anglophone press criticism, in not giving an unconditional pledge to Britain, when news came in that the Poles were proving recalcitrant over expanding their arrangement into a broader anti-aggression pact: 'now comes word that Poland herself will not stand with Britain, that she prefers to be with Germany and does not thank us for our offers to fight for her.'¹¹⁶ On Wednesday, 5 April, he had a vision of Hitler being pursued as a fugitive, and interpreted this as meaning that the German leader had,

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31 March 1939, p.2

¹¹² *Idem.*

¹¹³ TNA DO35/576/706/123, Cable from High Commissioner, Ottawa to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 2 April 1939

¹¹⁴ King, *Diary*, 30 March 1939, pp.3-5

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3 April 1939, p.1

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4 April 1939, p.2

against his wishes, been driven from his true purpose, 'to help the people.'¹¹⁷ Mackenzie King felt this vision to be important: 'there is, I think, significance in the clear vision as I saw him, and as he passed closely by me this morning.' He was condemnatory of Italy's action against Albania, but did not seem particularly perturbed by it: 'these gangsters intend to extend their territory, I think they are better left alone, with internal problems, etc., than to precipitate a world war.' His diary entry for the Monday revealed him as being more concerned by 'the linking up of Eng. with Greece, Romania, etc.' This reflected what he most feared; that 'some untoward act between Balkan States which might precipitate an immediate move that will quickly draw others into the conflict.'

The following day, his diary indicates he took Manion, the Leader of the Opposition, into his confidence.¹¹⁸ The Prime Minister was careful to point out the press had already covered all the significant issues and, particularly, 'that we had just been kept informed, and not consulted, and as usual, informed of what had taken place rather than of what was to be said.' By doing this, he again emphasised that his government retained its freedom from any moral or other commitments on British policy, before Parliament had had a chance to vote on the matter. News of the guarantee to Greece the same day led him to conclude in his diary: 'a complete change of attitude and means now that further aggression on the part of Hitler and Mussolini will certainly mean a European war.' However, he maintained the great danger was not aggression by the dictators, but the Balkan states provoking a general war through some 'flare-up.' The next day, the dominions were informed that France intended to include Romania in the guarantees and that, in the interests of presenting a united front, the United Kingdom would follow suit.¹¹⁹ By this stage the Prime Minister admitted to his diary that he was more concerned than he had ever been.¹²⁰ He feared the extent to which Britain had exposed itself by giving guarantees to Greece, Poland and Romania, without obtaining any assurances from Turkey or Russia. Likewise, he bemoaned the lack of commitment to collective security displayed by the eastern European states. The one redeeming feature he could see was that Chamberlain had not broken with the Italians, even though the Canadian leader recognised their untrustworthiness.

Mackenzie King did not want war, but was committed to supporting Britain if it came to pass. He disliked the 'peace front', but also its lack of success, as both left the situation more

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5 April 1939, p.1

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11 April 1939, p.1

¹¹⁹ LAC EA(RG25), Vol.725, File 74-3, Cable from Inskip to dominion prime ministers, 13 April 1939

¹²⁰ King, *Diary*, 13 April 1939, p.2

dangerous in his opinion. He would have preferred to continue with appeasement, as he felt this provided the best chance of maintaining peace, even if not for 'the wretched little states in the Balkans.'¹²¹ This preference was only reinforced by the reassurance he found in his visions, which he believed were a direct result of active spiritual intervention in his life. He remained uncomfortable with more mundane consultation, however, in case this led to him incurring a commitment which would later prove embarrassing, and, in this context, he was relieved that the lack of prior discussion allowed him to distance himself from the Polish guarantee, which he strongly disliked. He was also keen, in conversation with Manion, to distance himself from British decision-making in the wake of Albania, even if this was slightly stretching the truth. In spite of this he remained determined to back Britain if peace failed, and continued with his efforts to prepare the country for the eventuality of war. The increased chance of this occurring and involving Canada, with the attendant risk of isolation for Quebec, also convinced Lapointe of the necessity of rallying his people behind participation, leading him to reverse his stance and fully support the Prime Minister's efforts. In spite of Mackenzie King's continuing, if frail, hopes for peace, the events of March and April had left the Canadian government more convinced than ever of the risk of war, and more united than before in their readiness to face it.

New Zealand

The New Zealand government cabled London with its views on 21 March in response to the previous day's news that Britain had rejected Russia's proposal for a conference, which had been leaked to the press.¹²² This was not at all to Wellington's liking, and they therefore cabled London in the hope that 'a further expression of their views might not be without its use.'¹²³ By this time, Prague had been occupied; the supposed threat to Romania had emerged, leading to London's disappointing survey of European capitals and its consequent proposal to the Poles, Soviets and French that they together make a public commitment to mutually consult in the event of any further aggression.¹²⁴ The Savage government reiterated in their cable to London their conviction that a conference should be called to deal with the

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 21 March 1939, p.3

¹²² *The New Zealand Herald*, 22 March 1939, p.13

¹²³ TNA DO 35, 576/706/106, International Situation: New Zealand Views, Governor-General of New Zealand to Inskip, 21 March 1939; the unnamed author of 'Document A' in the file DO 35, 576/706/106, International Situation: New Zealand Views, considered Wellington could not have received the cable detailing the proposed consultation scheme between Britain, France, Poland and Russia before sending theirs. For the reasons given above, it seems much more likely the Savage government only intervened because it had received this cable and its predecessor.

¹²⁴ LAC EA(RG25), Vol.725, File 74-3, Circular Telegrams nos. 109 & 110 from Inskip to dominion prime ministers, 20 March 1939

international situation and would have liked one which had 'the widest possible sphere and with the widest possible agenda.'¹²⁵ By ruling nothing out, such a conference would have the scope to deal with all the issues that were causing international tension 'and of attempting the removal, if they can be removed, of the legitimate grievances that admittedly exist.' The last point shows the distance that existed between them and other anti-appeasers, such as Billy Hughes in Australia, who steadfastly refused to accept any justification for the complaints of the dissatisfied powers. Even after Prague, New Zealand was still prepared to recognise that some complaints were genuine and ought to be resolved. What had changed was the insertion of the caveat 'if they can be removed.' This indicated a concern, not previously expressed, that the current power structures in the aggressor states might be so entrenched and intransigent that resolution of grievances might no longer be possible.¹²⁶ Nonetheless, Wellington still considered it worthwhile to remind London of their previous proposals for an all-encompassing conference.

The New Zealand government were, however prepared to concede in their cable that, for this, 'the time might not be opportune.'¹²⁷ They instead suggested a conference be summoned 'for those nations which are opposed to aggression and which are now seeing danger to themselves more clearly than ever before.' This was clearly unlikely to be able to remove the remaining 'legitimate grievances.' This might therefore seem like dogmatic adherence to the idea of having a conference for the sake of having a conference, but it would have the added advantage of reaching out to the Soviets. New Zealand had always favoured collective security and had only reverted to undiluted dependence on Britain with its demise, so there was no harm, from their point of view, in building as broad a support as possible for resistance to aggression. Snubbing Moscow's suggestion was unlikely to achieve that. Similarly, they likewise drew attention to the opportunity they saw for greater co-operation with the United States which they also urged the British government 'to use their utmost endeavours to achieve.'

Finally the New Zealand government pledged their full support for Britain in the event of war 'in defence of decency of [*sic*] international life and traditions upon which British Commonwealth has been built.' This was more than a cosmetic gesture. It undoubtedly reflected the consensus in New Zealand public life that the public would demand immediate

¹²⁵ TNA DO 35, 576/706/106, International Situation: New Zealand Views, Governor-General of New Zealand to Inskip, 21 March 1939

¹²⁶ TNA DO 35, 576/706/106, International Situation: New Zealand Views, Document 'A', pp.1-2

¹²⁷ TNA DO 35, 576/706/106, International Situation: New Zealand Views, Governor-General of New Zealand to Inskip, 21 March 1939

participation in the event of war. It might also be expected that such a commitment would give greater weight to the concerns of the government making it. It equally drew attention to the common values which underpinned the relationship between Britain and the dominions, creating an image of solidarity, which, if sufficiently subtly done, could just be of benefit to a government which was well aware that, in only a matter of weeks, it would have to go cap in hand to London for the funds necessary to maintain itself.

This created some difficulty for the Dominions Office. Caught between Whitehall expectations of automatic dominion participation in the event of war and dominion sensitivity over their sovereignty on the other, they had no desire to needlessly antagonise a government who was evidently so co-operative on the subject.¹²⁸ Relations with New Zealand were already sufficiently fraught over the financial issue.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, they were also aware how unwelcome the proposals contained in the cable were. Chamberlain had no desire for a conference and on 31 March Inskip informed Sir Harry Batterbee, the newly arrived British High Commissioner in New Zealand, of his fears the Savage government did not understand 'how exceedingly cautious it is necessary to be in any action designed to encourage United States co-operation.'¹³⁰ Ideally, the Dominions Office response should satisfy the rest of Whitehall by steering New Zealand away from its contentious proposals without actually ruffling any feathers in Wellington. This would require consultation with other departments as well as meticulous attention on their own part, as the mandarins duly noted.¹³¹ As such, an immediate response was out of the question, but equally no useful purpose would be served by risking offence through appearing to ignore the suggestions. A holding telegram was therefore sent the same day thanking Wellington profusely for their pledge of loyalty and assuring them that their proposals would receive 'our early and most careful consideration.'¹³²

This was not, however, enough for Savage. In a rather forlorn attempt to further pressure London into adopting his advice, he went public with it in an interview the following day.¹³³ Somewhat disingenuously he professed a reluctance to involve himself in the European

¹²⁸ Stewart, *Empire Lost*, pp.18-19

¹²⁹ See, for instance, NANZ PM 16/1, pre 1939 Savage, Fraser & Jordan correspondence, Jordan to Savage, 14 December 1938

¹³⁰ TNA DO 35, 576/706/106, International Situation: New Zealand Views, Inskip to British High Commissioner in New Zealand, 31 March 1939

¹³¹ TNA DO 35, 576/706/106, International Situation: New Zealand Views, Hankinson to Harvey, 30 March 1939

¹³² TNA DO 35, 576/706/106, International Situation: New Zealand Views, Inskip to Governor-General of New Zealand, 21 March 1939

¹³³ Savage, M. J., as cited in *The New Zealand Herald*, 22 March 1939, p.12

situation and revisited the reasons he had given for adopting a similar stance the previous September, during the Sudeten crisis. He maintained his government's lack of intimate knowledge of the people, places and issues involved, together with their remoteness from the epicentre, barred them from lecturing London on the steps the latter should be taking. Savage also sought to calm public opinion. He therefore reassured his fellow-citizens that London had kept Wellington up to date with developments and deprecated the need to confirm the country's loyalty, but nonetheless affirmed that 'when Britain is in trouble, we are in trouble.' Like their counterparts in Canberra, the government saw no reason for an early summoning of Parliament. This would probably meet for its first session since the General Election of the previous 15 October, 'about the end of June.' Then, despite having just explained why his government was unwilling to advise London on the course of action it should adopt, he nevertheless publicly called on Britain to summon a conference to resolve the issues dividing the world. He argued such a 'combined action [*sic*] essential to settle the economic differences which are among the primary causes of wars.' Rather inconsistently, considering its proposed remit to tackle the matters separating the world, invitations to the conference were to be issued to 'peace-loving nations.' Savage went on to argue, however, that if this initiative was instigated by the British Commonwealth, it would be 'difficult for any nation to stand out.'

Jordan did not actually communicate with his government until 24 March and then by letter, rather than cable, so there would have been some delay in the receipt of this missive.¹³⁴ This was the letter in which Jordan first referred to the cable which had triggered the 'war scare' discussed in the previous chapter. In the interim between Savage's remarks quoted in the *New Zealand Herald*, discussed above, and this letter, the Germans had also seized Memel, but Jordan made no reference to that. He did, however, cover other aspects of the contemporary international situation. Firstly he refused to accept that there had been any fundamental alteration in British policy: 'the position at the present time is very little different from what it has been for almost the whole of the time I have been in England.' He did acknowledge that 'during the last few weeks there has been something of a change.' This did involve the adoption of something resembling collective security, but which would not involve the League of Nations and it was this which was of fundamental importance to the New Zealand High Commissioner, who complained: 'and I asked whether this matter was to be emphasised at the League, but I am given no encouragement in that direction.' He reported the threat to Romania, but acknowledged this was now discounted and that, in any

¹³⁴ NANZ PM/16/1939+ Correspondence/Jordan to Savage, 24 March 1939

case, 'if Roumania [*sic*] is occupied Britain will not take the initiative in resisting occupation.' Jordan then rather paradoxically wrote up the relatively modest British efforts as 'a pact to resist aggression.' In fact all that had been done at this point was to firstly survey European capitals as to their reaction in the case of an actual threat to Romania, and then a proposal had been made to Paris, Warsaw and Moscow that all four countries should publicly commit to consult in the case of further aggression, which fell somewhat short of Jordan's description. Nonetheless, he was correct in his assessment of the difficulties that would be caused by Russian involvement. He reported these countries felt 'that if Russia is admitted to their country, even to defend it, it is very unlikely they would afterwards be inclined to leave.' He also noted they felt the same way about entering into arrangements with Germany. With the detachment of an outsider, the New Zealand High Commissioner considered the resulting position to be 'most interesting.' He also reassured his government that the United States was now prepared to supply the democratic countries with arms and ammunitions, so long as these were paid for in cash, and there were even hopes that the Neutrality Act would be amended to permit participation in the event of a European conflict. The prospects for the British Empire were less happy, however. There was considerable uncertainty about Canada and South Africa seemed to be steering for neutrality.

Three days later, on the 27 March, Batterbee contacted his government. He did not think the New Zealand Government viewed the international situation sufficiently practically yet, reporting that 'ministers are beginning to get very worried here, but in a rather academic way.'¹³⁵ The following Thursday, 30 March, London advised Wellington about the proposed guarantee to Poland, confirming this as definite the next day. Also on 31 March, they replied to the proposals that Savage had originally made on the 21st.¹³⁶ They firstly tried to make themselves seem as open as possible by declaring 'we should welcome the maximum amount of co-operation from all powers.' Unfortunately, however, 'there is real difficulty, at the moment at any rate, in trying to arrange for any form of general conference.' The Scandinavian states had indicated their preference for neutrality and some of Germany's closer neighbours were understandably concerned not to be seen to be closely involved in any steps taken to deter aggression, therefore London had decided to approach 'in the first instance only a limited number of European Governments.' These were also 'the more important governments.' Nonetheless, they reassured New Zealand, 'we should not hesitate to adopt the procedure of a conference if it proved to be the best way of dealing with the

¹³⁵ TNA DO 35, 121/94/Sir Harry Batterbee to Sir Edward Harding, 27/3/39

¹³⁶ TNA DO 35, 576/706/106, International Situation: New Zealand Views, Inskip to New Zealand Government, 31 March 1939

situation.’ The language employed was significant, softening the blow of the refusal and appearing to leave open the option of a reconsideration of the matter at a later date, if circumstances changed. This was in spite of Chamberlain’s actual dislike of conferences, which continued unabated.¹³⁷ London also confirmed that ‘we are keeping in very close touch with the United States Government.’¹³⁸ Again, this had the advantage of sounding comforting, while actually committing the British to nothing. The Dominions Office was not, however, prepared to leave the contentious issue of involvement with the United States in this state, instead choosing to handle the matter discreetly the same day. Rather than put their objections to Savage’s suggestion in writing, they cabled Batterbee asking him to informally emphasise to the Prime Minister the necessity for extreme caution in dealing with America.¹³⁹ Wellington did not push either matter further at this stage and seemed satisfied with regard to the Polish Guarantee; with Berendsen informing Batterbee (which the latter duly relayed to London) that Savage ‘agreed the time had come to take a stand while thinking it regrettable that a stand had not been made in relation to Czechoslovakia.’¹⁴⁰

As in Australia, the Good Friday invasion of Albania came at an inopportune time for the government. In New Zealand, this was because it coincided with the annual party conference on Easter Monday, rather than the death of their leader, as in Canberra.¹⁴¹ This was of particular significance this year because of the continuing ‘Jack Lee Affair.’ It will be remembered that, after the General Election on 15 October, Lee had managed on 3 November to persuade Caucus to wrest control of cabinet appointments from the Prime Minister and that the latter had refused to accept this.¹⁴² The National Executive had subsequently imposed a compromise whereby Caucus would elect the cabinet after a general election, but the party leader would retain control of appointments in the interim.¹⁴³ This left Savage in control for the moment, but ultimately satisfied neither party. In the interim, Lee had allowed his vigorous criticisms of Savage, Nash and Fraser to become public knowledge through publication of the ‘Lee Letter’; a savage attack on the government and its policies.¹⁴⁴ Such disloyalty could not be ignored, and the triumvirate therefore sought to have Lee

¹³⁷ See, for instance, Watt, *How War Came*, p.177

¹³⁸ TNA DO 35, 576/706/106, International Situation: New Zealand Views, Inskip to New Zealand Government, 31 March 1939

¹³⁹ TNA DO 35, 576/706/106, International Situation: New Zealand Views, Dominions Office to Batterbee, 31 March 1939

¹⁴⁰ TNA DO 35, 576/706/125, Memorandum for Prime Minister, 3 April 1939

¹⁴¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 11 April 1939, p.8

¹⁴² J. A. Lee, *Diaries*, 4 November 1938, p.92

¹⁴³ Gustafson, *Cradle to the Grave*, pp.234 - 5

¹⁴⁴ J. A. Lee, *Diaries*, 5 December 1938, p.112

censured at conference.¹⁴⁵ In the end this happened, but he rationalised this setback away.¹⁴⁶ This was helped by conference's inability to be any more decisive than the National Executive had been previously. Having censured Lee, delegates subsequently elected him to the National Executive, thereby avoiding any opportunity to provide a clear-cut resolution to the crisis.¹⁴⁷ Consequently, the poison lingered on and would only be finally lanced with Lee's expulsion from the party at the behest of the terminally ill Savage in 1940.¹⁴⁸ It is therefore unsurprising that the cables from London, between 10 – 13 April, advising that the British cabinet was considering its reaction to Albania and then the decisions to guarantee Greece and Romania, elicited no response.

The subsequent Friday, 14 April, the long-awaited Pacific Defence Conference opened in Wellington.¹⁴⁹ Despite the tensions that had emerged between New Zealand and Australia over its scope, Savage reported to Galway that agreement had been reached on the demarcation of responsibilities as well as a common approach towards the United States.¹⁵⁰ The New Zealand Chiefs of Staff had identified Fiji, then undefended, as Japan's most likely target in the first instance, which was of particular importance to Wellington, as this was within air range of Auckland. The Chiefs of Staff therefore recommended its reinforcement, which the conference concurred in.¹⁵¹ The former had also appealed to their government's enlightened self-interest in their report on the British Committee of Imperial Defence's 'Paper on Imperial Defence, with special reference to New Zealand,' 'as our ability and willingness to co-operate on land or in the air in the defence of the Empire may prove in the end the most effective measure we can take for own security.'¹⁵² Consequently, they urged their masters to, 'within the financial resources of the country, do even more than at present contemplated.' The reference to finances was important as it will be recalled that the country's sterling funds had fallen to crisis point, while a number of government loans were also due for renewal in 1939.¹⁵³ Jordan's reports on the prospects for the satisfactory resolution of these two issues had been anything but optimistic, but Walter Nash, was due to

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.144-7

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.145-7

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.149

¹⁴⁸ Savage, M. J. S., as cited in *Standard*, 2/5/1940, as cited in Gustafson, *Cradle to the Grave*, p.267

¹⁴⁹ *The Dominion*, 14 April 1939, p.8

¹⁵⁰ NAA A981/4 PAC 1, Memoranda for the Governor-General by Savage, 15 & 16 May 1939

¹⁵¹ NAA A981/4 PAC 1, Memorandum for the Governor-General by Savage, 17 May 1938, p.2; *Ibid.*, Memorandum for the Governor General by Savage, 16 May 1939, p.2; & *NANZ Nash Papers*, Folder 1262, War Preparations, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Comments on the Paper on Imperial Defence, with special reference to New Zealand, drawn up by the Chiefs of Staff Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence', 4 April 1939, pp.2-3

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.3

¹⁵³ See Chapter One, above.

travel to London to arrange fresh funding for the government. The measures proposed by the Chiefs of Staff were certainly not costless, including the adoption of responsibility for an existing cruiser, the training of pilots and the manufacture of their aircraft, as Savage noted in his account for the Governor-General.¹⁵⁴ He continued that in fact the conference had subsequently recommended that New Zealand agree to the maintenance of not just an additional cruiser, but two escort vessels as well, which Savage asked Galway to inform London it could not accept 'until the position as to sterling funds has been clarified as the result of the Hon. Mr. Nash's discussions when in England.' Likewise the acceptance of the recommendations regarding pilots and aircraft were 'subject to sterling funds for this sum being available.' The New Zealand government's pressing financial situation was evidently never far from their thoughts.

The New Zealand delegation produced a paper for the conference, which assumed the Italians would sever the Mediterranean cable on the outbreak of war, leaving the Pacific cable, which passed through Fanning Island, as the only means of rapid communication between London and the Pacific dominions.¹⁵⁵ It was therefore anticipated that this would be a high priority for Japanese forces in the event of hostilities. However, due to the anticipated shortage of escorts, it was not expected that the island could be garrisoned after the outbreak of war, so forces would have to be despatched during peacetime. Wellington agreed to garrison the island for the British.

New Zealand's preoccupation with their domestic difficulties helps explain their relative lack of engagement, either with the Dominions Office or New Zealand House, unless the potential existed to divert British policy into a more palatable direction. The guarantees to Poland, and later to Greece and Romania, therefore passed largely unremarked, despite the revolutionary change in policy they signified, as Wellington agreed with them. The rejection of the Russian proposal for a conference was a different matter, however, and inspired not just a cable to London, but also an attempt to pressure Chamberlain into changing his stance through use of the press. Although New Zealand remained broadly supportive of Britain, it was therefore willing and capable of attempting to change British policy when it considered the situation warranted this.

¹⁵⁴ NAA A981/4 PAC 1, Memorandum for Governor-General from Savage, 16 May 1939.

¹⁵⁵ TNA DO 126/5 Pacific Defence Conference 1939, New Zealand Delegation, 'Defence of South Western Pacific.'

In Australia, the dictators' aggression had allowed Billy Hughes to enjoy a swan song as Minister for External Affairs. Page, the deputy Prime Minister and leader of the Country Party, had also been able to use this to push the Premiers' Conference into accepting his views on industrial development and planning, which they had previously opposed. This state of affairs was brought to an end with the replacement of Lyons by Menzies on the former's death. Menzies was an unabashed empire loyalist and, unlike his pacifist predecessor, favoured compulsory military service. He was determined to exercise full authority over external relations and therefore removed the troublesome Hughes from his post, recompensing the latter with the largely meaningless office of Deputy Prime Minister. He might have stamped his authority on foreign affairs more vigorously than Lyons, but the new Prime Minister's position was even more precarious than the former's had been. Menzies's backing for compulsory military training did not sit well with his opt-out from serving on the western front during the First World War. His loyalty to his former leader was open to question, which normally would not have mattered, but he had felt compelled to retain the services of his former rivals Casey and Hughes in cabinet, albeit in less prominent roles, and they resented him for it, making cabinet deliberations difficult. Worse, Page had turned against Menzies, ostensibly over his military record and the loyalty issue, and took the Country Party out of government, leaving the new Prime Minister as head of a minority government which was not even the largest party in Parliament. He could only continue in office through the support of Page, who clearly loathed him. Government in Australia ended April considerably weaker than it had begun March, particularly over external affairs due to its entanglement with the compulsory military training question.

In South Africa, a precarious consensus seemed to endure among the ruling party. Its basis, however, appeared to have been altered out of all recognition by the dictators' actions. Both Hertzog and Smuts remained committed to the Fusion experiment, but the former had never overcome the sense of rejection he had suffered from the defection of Dr. Malan and his followers, at the time of the merger of the National and South Africa parties in 1934, and he remained extraordinarily sensitive to any charges that he had 'sold out' from that quarter. The idea of leading South Africa into an 'English' war was therefore anathema to him. As far as he was concerned South Africa had no interests in Eastern Europe and he was not prepared to participate in resistance to German expansion there. Smuts, having agreed to the Neutrality Pact in September, trailed along unhappily in his wake. The latter had never believed war would break out over the Sudeten question, but since January had come to see

it as increasingly inevitable. Hertzog was aware that the Neutrality Pact could not entirely solve his party's difficulties over participation and was therefore anxious to prevent the question arising.

Like Chamberlain, he seems to have been initially unsure how to react to the German seizure of Prague, reverting to an enigmatic silence. His High Commissioner in London's desperate appeal for an intervention to dissuade the British from committing themselves in eastern Europe drew forth a characteristically robust response, questioning whether the decidedly modest British proposal for consultation amounted to encirclement, and warning how provocative this would appear in both Germany and South Africa. The British mollified him that they had not ruled out a peaceful solution and would make an appropriate gesture when the circumstances were right, but their subsequent rush to guarantee Poland astounded the South Africans, and pushed them in the direction of neutrality. Italy's occupation of Albania transformed the situation. It appeared that the Axis were acting in conjunction with each other, which threatened 'our' communications through the Suez Canal as far as the Union were concerned. The government could unite around this as a legitimate South African interest, leading to a much more co-operative attitude as far as the British were concerned. As this new spirit of co-operation was based on the faulty premise of Axis co-ordination, it was largely illusory, however. The governing party's own unity was equally precarious, depending, as it did, on the avoidance of a war with Germany alone over Eastern European issues.

In contrast, the New Zealand government remained broadly supportive of Britain. They had little alternative. Their strategic review, conducted in the wake of Munich, conceded that their ideal of collective security through the League of Nations was dead, at least for the time being, and that they would have to depend instead on Britain's dubious dedication to the Singapore strategy for the foreseeable future. Their financial difficulties would also require sympathetic treatment from London, while the 'Jack Lee Affair' provided ample distraction from events abroad they could neither control nor influence. Nonetheless, they were capable of intervening when London moved in a direction which they did not like. Questions over the dependability of Britain's commitment to Singapore made it desirable that as broad a basis of support as possible was achieved for British policy. They therefore suggested greater engagement with the United States in view of what appeared to be a firmer stance in Washington. What really perturbed them, however, was the British rejection of the Soviet proposal for a conference. Not only did they cable London directly, the Prime Minister also publicly called on Britain in the press to instigate a conference, a step he noticeably did not

take with his American proposal. Their support for the Soviet proposal appeared to be somewhat confused, however. It is clear that they in fact supported a general conference which would involve all the world's powers and address all outstanding grievances, not one which was restricted to considering resistance to aggression involving only 'the peace-loving nations.' Antagonising the Soviets, by rejecting their proposal outright, might, however, lead to Moscow's disengagement from the problem of the aggressor states, narrowing the basis of support available for dealing with the issue. This was not to be welcomed and the Savage government therefore supported the idea of such a conference, even if it did not appear capable of delivering the objects they required of it.

Among the dominions, the most significant repercussion arising from the seizure of Prague was undoubtedly in Canada. Here, Mackenzie King's *Quebecois* lieutenant, Ernest Lapointe, had, up to this point, steadfastly opposed each and every measure the Prime Minister had put forward to prepare Canadian public opinion for war. He had feared the impact any such steps would have on the Liberal Party vote in his province. This remained an overriding concern so long as he believed war was unlikely; however, Hitler's action changed this. It now seemed much more likely that war would break out in circumstances where Anglophone opinion would sweep the country into participation, regardless of Quebec. If his province held out against participation in this situation, it risked losing all the advantages he had won for it during his long partnership with Mackenzie King. In order to forestall this eventuality, *Quebecois* opinion would have to be reconciled to the prospect of war. Lapointe therefore offered no criticism of the Prime Minister's statements on foreign affairs, even agreeing to the toughening of their wording. It was also important to assuage opinion in the province by ruling out conscription in advance which the Canadian leader did on 30 March. Mackenzie King was not, however, in a position to inspire the *Quebecois* and this task fell to Lapointe himself in a rousing speech on 31 March. It is telling that this was delivered after the guarantee to Poland had been issued, showing that, however unwelcome this measure might be in itself, it did not affect the underlying reality that war was now more likely and opinion in Quebec still needed to be persuaded to reconcile itself to Anglophone thinking on the subject, since the concession over conscription had been granted. The Prime Minister may have liked neither the 'peace front' nor its failure, and was certainly as hostile to consultation as ever, but he at least could now look forward to leading a united government into whatever might befall. It was scant consolation.

6: END-GAME:

THE SOVIETS, DANZIG AND THE CORRIDOR

While the outlines of the conflict that would break out on 1 September 1939 can certainly be discerned with hindsight from the end of April 1939, war, as Richard Overy points out, was certainly not yet inevitable.¹ The diplomatic arrangements concluded in the last chapter left two separate strands unresolved: the role the Soviet Union was to play; and how the interconnected questions of Danzig and the Polish Corridor were to be settled. Stalin certainly did not play the part assigned him by the western powers. Negotiations with the Soviets had been initiated on 21st March 1939, when it had appeared Romanian independence might be under threat from Germany.² Poland had, however, refused to accept any Russian involvement, but this had not been the end of the matter, as London still considered Moscow might have a role to play, as Inskip put it in a cable to the dominion leaders on 21 March, 'in the most convenient form.'³ Stirling summarised the progress of negotiations since then for Canberra on 4 August, noting that an impasse had been reached over the definition of 'indirect aggression.'⁴ He characterised the Russian position as wishing to protect themselves against the situation where a neighbouring incumbent government was induced to invite an anti-Soviet presence within its borders, in much the same way as the Czechs had behaved in requesting the Germans march into Prague. Such concerns might appear reasonable, but, unfortunately, it had not proved possible to devise a formula which would not also permit the Soviets to claim provocation in circumstances allowing them, dragging Paris and London in their wake, to declare open season on their neighbours (in the way they would later in 1939 – 1940). Although they professed a belief in Soviet sincerity, Stirling noted, such a proposal was unacceptable to the British side. It was decided that it would be undesirable to postpone military discussions further pending political agreement, and Britain and France accordingly despatched missions to Moscow, as Inskip advised the dominion leaders on 25 July, but these did not arrive until 11 August.⁵ This endeavour was then cut short by the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 24 August 1939.⁶

¹ R. Overy, *1939: Countdown to War*, (London, 2010), p. 16.

² NAA A981(4)/Ger/83/Part 2/German Foreign Policy/Inskip to Dominion Prime Ministers, 21 March 1939

³ Watt, *How War Came*, pp. 176 & 179; NAA A981(4)/GER 67 Part 1/Germany – Relations with Poland, Inskip to dominion Prime Ministers, 21 March 1939.

⁴ NAA A981(4)/GRE A 8 PART 5/Stirling to Canberra, 9 August 1939.

⁵ NAA A981(4)/GRE A 8 PART 5/Inskip to Menzies, 25 July 1939; Watt, *How War Came*, p. 450.

⁶ Overy, *Countdown*, p. 14.

In the interim, neither the Poles nor the Germans had displayed much interest in negotiations to resolve the differences between them, despite British endeavours to persuade the two sides to talk to each other.⁷ Germany had initially sought the return of Danzig and an extraterritorial 'corridor across the Corridor'.⁸ In contrast, the Poles had been reported (in a cable from London to dominion leaders on 29 March) to be prepared to agree to some concessions on Danzig's status, but not its actual return to Germany, and unwilling to contemplate the infringement of their sovereignty inherent in Germany's demand for extraterritorial transit rights, although they might agree to the waiving of 'formalities.'⁹ The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact prompted a last flurry of diplomatic activity, with Britain trying to induce direct German-Polish negotiations, and Germany trying to drive a wedge between Poland and the western powers. As part of this, on 29 August, Hitler insisted Warsaw despatch a plenipotentiary with full powers to negotiate within twenty-four hours, the intention being to break off negotiations on 31 August, throwing the blame on the Poles, in time for invasion on 1 September.¹⁰ When no envoy was forthcoming on 30 August, the Germans produced a list of demands for propaganda purposes, which Ribbentrop insisted had lapsed due to the Poles' lack of co-operation.¹¹ Despite efforts to involve the Polish Ambassador in Berlin in negotiations with the Germans on 31 August, no meaningful discussions took place (or could have taken place, given Nazi intentions), and Hitler commenced hostilities in the early hours of 1 September.¹² After an initial delay due to French military imperatives, Britain and France duly fulfilled their obligations under their guarantee to Poland, by declaring war on Germany on 3 September.

The dominions were, naturally enough, not left untouched by developments in Europe. On 21 July, Mackenzie King confided in his diary that he had at long last received a reply to his 1 February letter to Hitler.¹³ This inspired the Canadian leader to once more involve himself in attempts at personal mediation to ease international tension. In South Africa, Hitler's violent resolution of the stand-off with Poland on 1 September tore apart the consensus

⁷ See, for instance, LAC, EA/RG25/Vol. 725/74-3, Inskip to dominion Prime Ministers, 8, 15 & 19 August 1939

⁸ A. Hitler as cited in NASA, SAB/BTS/1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Gie to Hertzog, 29 April 1939

⁹ LAC, EA/RG25/Vol. 725/74-3, Inskip to dominion Prime Ministers, 29 March 1939.

¹⁰ LAC, EA/RG25/Vol. 725/74-4, Inskip to dominion Prime Ministers, 29 August 1939; naturally, neither the British nor the dominions were aware of German intent at this point, for evidence of this, see, for instance, Watt, *How War Came*, p. 508.

¹¹ Kershaw, *Nemesis*, p. 220.

¹² Overy, *Countdown*, pp. 62 – 65.

¹³ King, *Diary*, 21 July 1939, p. 11.

which had held the Fusion regime together, leading to what became known as the Neutrality Crisis. Finally, the dominions faced the prospect of how, as well as if, they would enter the war which had broken out in Europe.

Flirting with the Soviets

As previously seen, Mackenzie King had been unhappy that Britain had become involved in negotiations with the Soviet Union. This was partly because he considered splitting Europe into ideological camps would only exacerbate tensions, as he noted in his diary on 21 March.¹⁴ However, he not only regretted this creation of a 'democratic front' on the grounds it might be provocative, his diary for the preceding day revealed he also objected to Russia's inclusion in it on the grounds the latter was not a proper democracy.¹⁵ As always, however, it was the Quebec dimension which lay at the root of Mackenzie King's thinking. In his 24 March report to London, Sir Gerald Campbell recounted a conversation with the Canadian Prime Minister where the latter had

expressed regret that it should apparently have become necessary for the United Kingdom to associate herself with the U.S.S.R. From the Canadian point of view, particularly that of French Canadians and other Roman Catholic communities that association would still be regarded as very unfortunate.¹⁶

It was their aversion to communism, and the difficulty which this might cause him, that lay at the heart of the matter. In contrast, the South Africans were primarily concerned with the practical consequences of any deal with the Soviets, rather than any direct effect it might have on domestic politics. General Hertzog, had instructed Te Water in his 22 March cable, to warn Britain that the 'encirclement' of Germany would lead inexorably to a war, which the western powers would ultimately be held responsible for.¹⁷ Next, Dr. Gie placed the prospect of an agreement with Moscow in this framework, cautioning Pretoria on 15 April that: 'perhaps the gravest danger in the situation is an Anglo-Russian Pact the conclusion of which might lead Hitler to overcome his last scruples against taking a step which will lead to war.'¹⁸ Hertzog repeated this view to Te Water on 21 April, asking the latter to bring this to London's attention, while expressing the hope that Britain would not do anything irrevocably to commit itself to the Russian side as this would be 'calculated to cause maximum friction

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 March 1939, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20 March 1939, p. 6.

¹⁶ TNA, DO/35/576/706/118/Cable from High Commissioner, Ottawa to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 24 March 1939

¹⁷ NASA, SAB/PM/1/20/1/UK Foreign Policy, Hertzog to Te Water, 22 March 1939

¹⁸ NASA, SAB/BTS/1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Gie to Hertzog, 15 April 1939.

with Dictator states.¹⁹ It was war that would present the Union with insurmountable domestic difficulty, not a distant association with godless communism. Australia was similarly pragmatic. They disliked the idea of a world-wide agreement with Russia as this would increase the risk of conflict with Japan. On 22 May, Menzies, the new Australian Prime Minister, accordingly instructed Bruce, his High Commissioner in London, to inform the British government that 'we attach great importance to preserving friendship with Japan, and would therefore be unhappy about any Russian agreement about the Far East.'²⁰ It might be thought New Zealand would share this concern, but they were, in fact, the most ambivalent of the dominions towards relations with Moscow. Jordan, their High Commissioner in London, was certainly in favour of Russian involvement as he indicated to Wellington on 27 April.²¹ The triumvirate in Wellington, however, had only achieved power through successfully competing against communism for the working-class vote. Fraser, in particular, seems to have been a fervent anti-communist in the domestic context.²² Nevertheless, with respect to external affairs, they appear to have been particularly concerned that the world's most important left-wing power should not be excluded from any steps taken to prevent further aggression.²³

To the extent that they had not already done so, however, the dominions reconciled themselves to the desirability of reaching an agreement with the Russians. Even Mackenzie King, while continuing to express his discomfiture that Britain had ever become involved with Moscow in the first place, recognised in his diary on 30 March that Russia's absence from the 'peace front' undermined the latter's potential deterrent effect on Hitler.²⁴ New Zealand, on the other hand, considered an agreement with Russia to be, in Savage's message to Inskip on 12 May, 'essential.'²⁵ The New Zealand Prime Minister further expressed his government's concern at the lack of progress and the length of time being taken, letting it be known via Sir Harry Batterbee on 25 May that these delays left Wellington 'very disturbed.'²⁶ Batterbee added the New Zealand government felt that all possible steps should be taken to resolve the impasse. Jordan likewise informed Inskip, at a meeting of the latter with the dominion High Commissioners in London on 23 May, that Wellington felt Russian involvement to be imperative, because of the assistance Moscow could provide in the event

¹⁹ NASA, SAB/PM/1/20/1/U. K. Foreign Policy, Hertzog to Te Water, 21 April 1939.

²⁰ NAA A981/4/GREA 8 PART 4/Great Britain – Foreign Policy, Menzies to Bruce, 22 May 1939.

²¹ NANZ, PM/16/*Fraser*, Jordan & Savage Correspondence: 39+, Jordan to Savage, 27 April 1939.

²² Sinclair, *Nash*, p. 148.

²³ See previous chapter.

²⁴ King, *Diary*, 30 March 1939, p. 3.

²⁵ TNA, DO 114/98/Correspondence March – September 1939, Savage to Inskip, 12 May 1939.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Sir Harry Batterbee, British High Commissioner in New Zealand, to Inskip, 23 May 1939.

of war.²⁷ In Australia, Menzies also felt that an agreement with Russia was required to give substance to the arrangements with Poland, Turkey and Romania as he had explained in his cable to Bruce on 22 May.²⁸ He added that: 'short of a positive demand to expand the agreement to the Far East, we do not think the negotiations [with the U. S. S. R.] should be allowed to fail.' Even the South Africans only sought to limit the terms and nature of any arrangement which might be reached, rather than prevent it altogether. Smuts may have been rather isolated in believing, as he confided to Margaret Gillett on 8 August 'if the Russian Treaty is not carried through, there will be war this summer.'²⁹ Nevertheless, even Hertzog only tried to persuade the British to restrict any agreement reached, seeking to persuade them via Te Water 'that no obligations should be entered into with Russia which may hereafter preclude such consideration and negotiation in the interests of future peace.'³⁰ These instructions to Te Water also contained the concession with regard to the actual terms proposed by Moscow; that their consequences 'His Majesty's Government in Great Britain will know much better than we here.' Taken together with the concerns noted in the paragraph above, it is evident the primary South African aim was damage limitation. While he would have liked to argue against any involvement with Russia at all, Hertzog appears to have recognised that this was a lost cause. His argument in favour of a limited agreement used points which might have been constructed into such a case, but fell short of actually trying to do so. It seemed that the logic of the situation was driving London into some kind of pact with Moscow, so that the best he could hope for in the circumstances, was to persuade the British not to agree to anything that would irretrievably prevent a resumption of appeasement at a later date.

Mackenzie King's reaction to the news of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was one of relief, noting in his diary on 22 August that 'I have never trusted the Russians.'³¹ He had some sympathy with their action, however, after the way they had been slighted by Britain and France: 'nor have I altogether blamed them after the way they were side tracked by England and the pressure put on France to abandon her ally.' He reflected that it was better that this should happen now, rather than after war had broken out. He also felt 'the danger of world war had been reduced a thousand fold.' The western powers would have to back down over Poland and bow to Hitler's terms, which he admitted would 'be hard for Britain and France

²⁷ TNA, DO 121/5/Meetings between the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs and Dominion High Commissioners, Minutes, 23 May 1939.

²⁸ NAA A981/4/GREA 8 PART 4/Great Britain – Foreign Policy, Menzies to Bruce, 22 May 1939.

²⁹ NASA, *Smuts Papers* (A1), Vol. 246, Smuts to Margaret Gillett, 8 August 1939.

³⁰ NASA, SAB/PM/1/20/1/U. K. Foreign Policy, Hertzog to Te Water, 21 April 1939.

³¹ King, *Diary*, 22 August 1939, p. 1.

to accept, but anything is better than destruction by war.' If Hitler sought world domination, this would be his time to strike, but 'I have never believed this was his aim.' Two days later his diary revealed his attitude had hardened towards the Soviets, however, as he now felt they had been 'playing the most treacherous game that has every [*sic*] been played, I believe, by any nation.'³²

Hertzog in South Africa likewise believed the Nazi-Soviet pact created an opportunity to launch a new diplomatic initiative. He cabled Te Water on 26 August, instructing him to urge the British government that 'everything should be done to convert the present danger into opportunity for a comprehensive settlement.'³³ The agreement had left the Poles in a most vulnerable position, so they were more likely to be susceptible to pressure by 'every legitimate means' to be 'helpful.' Moderation could, in any case, secure their position as advantageously as possible. Hertzog saw an opportunity for a wider settlement of outstanding grievances and believed 'this seems also to be the underlying idea of Hitler's offer.' He appealed for 'a coming together of Germany and Poland with such other parties as may be advisable to settle Danzig and Corridor question to be followed thereafter by wider European discussions between the powers concerned.'

In Australia, Menzies greeted the news with the public statement 'the whole British world will face the news with calm and the increased determination of complete unity.'³⁴ Bruce, however, was of one mind with Mackenzie King and Hertzog in seeing the pact as almost a last chance to reach an accommodation with Hitler. He therefore urged Menzies to use his influence on London to pursue any available opportunities for a diplomatic solution: 'I think a cable from you to Prime Minister stressing this [necessity of exploring every avenue to keep door to negotiation open] would be of great value.'³⁵ Apparently Menzies disagreed, as he did not take this opportunity to intervene. In New Zealand the cabinet concealed its disappointment at the failure of negotiations, with both the government and opposition taking the opening offered by the Budget debate in the House of Representatives to affirm the unity of the country and its solidarity with Britain in the event of war.³⁶

³² *Ibid.*, 24 August 1939, p. 2.

³³ NASA, SAB/BTS/1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Hertzog to Te Water, 26 August 1939.

³⁴ R. G. Menzies as cited in TNA, DO 114/98/Correspondence March – September 1939, Sir Geoffrey Whiskard, British High Commissioner in Australia to Inskip, 23 August 1939.

³⁵ NAA, A981/4/GER 19 PART 2 ATTACHMANT (*sic*) A/Germany. Administration and Government II, Bruce to Menzies, 23 August 1939.

³⁶ TNA, DO 114/98/Correspondence March – September 1939, Sir Harry Batterbee, British High Commissioner in New Zealand to Inskip, 23 August 1939.

Dr. Gie, the South African Minister in Berlin, elaborated his views on Poland to Te Water in a letter of 3 May 1939, describing the coastal area as far as Memel as 'ancient German land', whose return was "inevitable" as well as 'just and right'.³⁷ He also displayed a touching faith in the power of German public opinion in the Third Reich, claiming that Hitler could not give up Germany's claim as 'his people would not allow him to do so.' He conceded that it might be 'difficult for the English to realise all this,' but that 'they should read German history.' He also concluded that 'Hitler does not want to plunge his people into war' and describing him as 'being aware that his annexation of the land of the Czechs has profoundly shocked British public opinion.' This was another reason he was willing to wait was to let them get over this. Gie urged that nothing should be done that would indicate that Hitler's opponents would not eventually give way over Danzig and the Corridor. In the meantime, he remained cautiously optimistic: 'we cannot believe that Britain and France will allow Poland to provoke a European war over Danzig and the Corridor, but knowing something of the present mentality of the Poles, we are not quite sure.' Gie insisted that the question 'can we trust Hitler?' was less important than 'can we understand him?' for the British, as understanding him would allow London to appreciate that his ambitions were both limited and compatible with British interests. Gie reiterated that 'Hitler wants peace and his territorial programme in Europe is indeed limited to the acquisition of Danzig and its northern part of the Corridor,' and that, when he had achieved this, Europe could look forward to peace for a long time to come. Gie made a final appeal: 'surely it is worthwhile, even for those who may doubt my assurance, to play this last card of confidence in the Great Game of Peace, in which all will be the winners.' He added a postscript that he had spoken to many Germans including moderates, who were astonished at both the moderation of Hitler's offer and the Poles' rejection of it, and who believed that such generosity should not be repeated. With Te Water, he was, of course, preaching to the converted, and the latter was sufficiently impressed by Gie's analysis to pass it on to the British, apparently with Hertzog's blessing. Smuts was similarly unimpressed with the Polish viewpoint, writing to Margaret Gillett on 10 June: 'I don't like the Danzig business. We have a very bad case there and Hitler knows it.'³⁸ He continued to feel this, confiding in her as late as 28 August, that 'with us there is no enthusiasm for Poland, still less for Danzig and the Corridor.'³⁹ Nonetheless, he had by then come out against neutrality, contrasting his position with

³⁷ TNA, DO/35/540/C87/43/Gie to Te Water, 3 May 1939

³⁸ NASA, *Smuts Papers* (A1), Vol. 246, Smuts to M. C. Gillett, 10 June 1939.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 28 August 1939.

Hertzog's to her: 'and on the other side (which happens to be my own) there is the difficulty in understanding how in the long run we could possibly keep out of the fight, and how we could do so now consistently with our honour and vital interests.' He further noted, 'A great storm is therefore brewing here too. I had to face it 25 years ago and never thought of having it all over again.'

In contrast to the South Africans, Sir Cecil Day reported to Wellington on 22 May that Warsaw had a strong case.⁴⁰ As regards the Corridor, Poles rejected this term with its implicit assumption that the region was an artificial 'outlet to the sea' imposed on Germany. Instead they saw the area as *Pomorze*, 'ethnographically and historically a Polish province.' He also argued that if the Germans militarised Danzig, the way they had done so to Memel since the latter's incorporation on 23 March 1939, then they would 'acquire a stranglehold on the Corridor and Gdynia [Poland's only major Port] will finally become untenable.' In contrast, as things stood, Warsaw held the initiative, with Germany being unable to rapidly bring force to bear, while the Poles could launch a pre-emptive action to 'occupy Danzig in a few hours.' He further contended that Polish rights in Danzig were important psychologically as 'a symbol of their national existence.' Abandoning these risked internal instability and anti-German incidents on a scale likely to provoke Nazi intervention, thus increasing, rather than reducing, the danger of European conflict. He considered Warsaw might ignore a unilateral declaration of adherence to the Reich by the Danzig Senate, so long as this was not backed up by any attempt to interfere with Polish officials or property in the Free City. Otherwise it was likely such a step would be met with force. He judged German intentions were to neutralise and perhaps destroy Poland. There was no justification for Hitler's demands: he had ignored self-determination over Prague and so had no right to claim it for Danzig now; while existing transit arrangements across the Corridor had worked quite satisfactorily since 1934. Mistreatment of minorities undoubtedly occurred in both countries, but this was a long-standing issue which did not justify confrontation at this critical juncture. The issue had, however, escalated beyond a mere border dispute, becoming 'a test case, and the stakes may not be lower than the German attempt at domination of Eastern Europe.'

The Australians were rather less robust in their backing for Poland. As has already been seen, Bruce, Canberra's representative in London, saw the Nazi-Soviet Pact as an opportunity to stave off war by pressurising the Poles to come to an accommodation with

⁴⁰ NANZ, EA/276/2/1/Danzig: External Relations with Germany, Extracts from Sir Cecil Day's Notes, 22 May 1939, p. 2.

Germany. Bob Menzies, the Prime Minister, however, while also in favour of a peaceful solution, was equally anxious that there should be no new Munich. Thus on 18 August 1939, he had cabled Chamberlain urging 'that efforts should be made to ensure Poland adopts a reasonable and restrained attitude.'⁴¹ Indeed, such a conciliatory stance should not be confined to Poland: 'no nation should ignore real efforts at settlement because of false notions of prestige.' While this seemed to be somewhat suggestive of appeasement, the Australian Prime Minister tempered his advice with a fairly forceful caveat: 'nevertheless, I strongly hold the view that pressure on Poland should not be carried to a point which might awaken in Hitler's mind any thoughts that the Anglo-French guarantee to Poland in the event of aggression was in the least doubt of fulfilment.' He was convinced any such display of weakness would be fatal: 'that would in my mind certainly lead to German aggression and war.' Australia therefore not only accepted that there were limits to the influence that should be exerted on Poland, but German aggression was now definitely to be met by war. On 27 August Menzies intervened again, cabling Chamberlain that Germany's proposals should be treated with a good deal of scepticism, 'having regard to past experience.'⁴² In particular, there should be no hint that Britain might abandon Poland 'as this would not only be a breach of guarantee, but disastrous in South East Europe.' Hitler needed to be clearly informed that there was no question of London going back on its word to Poland. It should also be made clear to him, however, that Britain had no fixed view on the ultimate status of Danzig and the Corridor as such, and was quite prepared to see the question resolved by peaceful negotiation between Germany and Poland. There was, indeed, no obstacle to a general settlement between the powers, which would have the happy consequence of ending the ruinous arms race that threatened all their economic prosperity. This goodwill towards Germany should not, however, be confused with a lack of will to resist any fresh aggression that might occur. Menzies was equally clear that negotiations should not leave Poland in the situation Czecho-Slovakia had found herself in. He suggested another summit, but this time on neutral territory. In conclusion, he claimed to see real progress in Hitler's responses to the British messages since the Nazi-Soviet Pact. On 2 September, he sent a final cable.⁴³ His attitude had clearly hardened. While Australia did not regard Danzig and the Corridor worth

⁴¹ NAA, CP/290/6/BUNDLE 1/4A/International Situation 1939 Personal Exchanges between Prime Minister Great Britain and Prime Minister Australia, Menzies to Chamberlain, 18 August 1939.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Menzies to Chamberlain, 27 August 1939.

⁴³ This was still 1 September in Europe. Although hostilities had broken out between Germany and Poland, Menzies appears unaware of this. This is perhaps unsurprising, as the cable appears to have been sent shortly after midnight (Chamberlain's response was received at 12.52 a.m. Australian time on 2 September), and the news was still being treated as 'unconfirmed' in London. To add to the difficulty, communication was via the Department of External Affairs in Canberra, but Menzies himself was in Melbourne, see NAA, A2697, Vol. 2, Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 2 September 1939.

a war in and of themselves, 'we do attach great importance to protecting Poland against being weakened and subsequently destroyed.' In his view, 'this would begin a process the end of which cannot be seen, but which we believe would be deplorable.' Nevertheless, Germany's proposals appeared to be reasonable, and 'any point blank refusal on the part of Poland might very well adversely affect public opinion even here.' Significantly, Menzies was not arguing for their acceptance, only that they should not be dismissed out of hand, so that Poland was not left in the position of appearing unreasonable.

Notwithstanding his continuing commitment to support Britain over German aggression, Mackenzie King had, from the outset, disliked the British guarantee to Poland almost as much as their negotiations with the Soviets. He recognised in his diary on 30 March that it amounted to 'an ultimatum on the part of Britain and France to Germany to tell her she has gone as far as she is going to be permitted to go.'⁴⁴ As previously seen, he doubted its deterrence value and feared its potentially provocative impact on the volatile Hitler.⁴⁵ All this had left the Canadian leader deeply pessimistic, noting in his diary on 30 March: 'undoubtedly, this is as critical a stage as has yet been reached.'⁴⁶ He continued this entry with his suspicions about Polish intentions, fearing that they were just using the western powers to secure the best deal possible from Germany, before abandoning their erstwhile partners: 'Poland, moreover, is, I fear not a country to be trusted.' Germany's location meant that Warsaw was bound to be more susceptible to influence from Berlin than London or Paris: 'she [Poland] is more likely to regard her proximity with Germany to cause her to throw in her lot with that country as against France and Britain.' The latter, having confronted Germany on Poland's behalf in the expectation that Berlin would at least be facing the dreaded war on two fronts, would instead be abandoned to oppose Hitler alone: 'more or less out on a limb.' His ultimate fear was that this would happen during war-time: 'should she prove treacherous, it might mean an appalling situation in Europe.' If he had to be tied to anywhere in eastern Europe, he would have preferred Prague to Warsaw, writing in his diary the following day: 'the Czechs, so far as I am led to believe, are infinitely more reliable than the Poles.'⁴⁷

When he heard that Poland had refused to extend its obligations to the rest of the 'peace front' for fear of antagonising Germany, he took this as evidence his assessment had been right, entering in his diary on 4 April: 'now word comes that Poland herself will not stand

⁴⁴ King, *Diary*, 30 March 1939, p. 3.

⁴⁵ See previous chapter.

⁴⁶ King, *Diary*, 30 March 1939, p. 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 31 March 1939, p. 2.

with Britain, that she prefers to be with Germany, and does not thank us for our offers to fight for her.'⁴⁸ He also felt this vindicated his refusal to grant London 'a blank cheque,' of Canadian support in any circumstances:

if anything could show more completely the wisdom of what I said on Thursday last [his statement on external affairs in Parliament, where he had avoided committing Canada to automatic participation in the event of war], and the utter folly of following British Governments regardless of what their policy might be, this surely does.

His suspicions of Polish intentions also quickly resurfaced, leading him to note: 'As Handy [his private secretary, who typed up his diary] has just remarked, Poland might have been treacherous if something had started. This clearly is so, and Heaven knows where the British Empire would have landed had such been the case.'

His opinion of the Polish guarantee did not improve as time wore on. In his diary, he described complaining on 28 April to Campbell that he could not understand British policy with regard to Poland and Romania, entering into negotiations 'without knowing where they were going to lead her, or how they were going to conclude.'⁴⁹ Bad as things were, he sensed a deterioration in the position on 16 August. That day a despatch arrived advising that Hitler had warned Poland that if there was an 'incident' he would attack forthwith, which inspired the diary entry that this 'brings the world nearer war, I think, than it has been at any time since Munich.'⁵⁰ As previously seen, news of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact actually brought him relief from this unbearable anxiety: surely now London would give way and there would be peace after all. When news came through on 22 August, however, that the British government had repeated its pledges to Poland and would put a Defence Act before Parliament on the 24th, he confided in his journal his feeling:

that England had closed the door pretty effectively to the chance of a retreat. I questioned in my mind the wisdom of taking such tremendous risks over some [*sic*] small an issue as Danzig. I cannot get out of my mind the blundering there has been in England's foreign policy all along the way.⁵¹

The German invasion of Poland on 1 September did not significantly alter Mackenzie King's views. He continued to wish that the Poles had been more flexible, as 'everything looked so near a settlement.'⁵² Nevertheless, he clung to the hope that 'we might still be saved from the appalling situation of England and France getting into the war.' The following day, he

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 4 April 1939, p. 2.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 25 April 1939, p. 4.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 16 August 1939, p. 2.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 22 August 1939, p. 4.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 1 September 1939, p. 7.

persisted in blaming the Poles for not negotiating, but was now also inclined to pass some blame London's way for leading them on, and even to accept that Hitler, all along, 'really had conquest in view.'⁵³ He continued to maintain, however, that it would be better to give in to German terms, however harsh these might be, than to permit 'the war to run on.' Even after he had successfully brought Canada into a war to resist German aggression against Poland, he remained unconvinced of the merits of the Allied cause, writing in his diary on 10 September: 'how criminally foolish those in authority in Britain and France have been in not getting down long before this, being prepared to give something in the way of concession to Germany which would have avoided this terrible war.'⁵⁴

Mackenzie King and the Personal Touch

Personal contacts were always of critical significance to Mackenzie King. In July, Hitler finally responded to the letter the Canadian Prime Minister had sent him with such high hopes on 1 February.⁵⁵ As he recounted it in a letter to Chamberlain on 24 July, the *Führer's* response had been passed on orally by Dr. Windels, the German Consul in Ottawa three days previously, on Friday, 21 July 1939.⁵⁶ In this reply, Hitler had invited twelve Canadians to visit Germany for three weeks at Hitler's expense. Far from being slighted by such offhand treatment, Mackenzie King was delighted with the form of the reply: noting in his diary that night, that it was 'to make clear no binding or official character, tho' paving the way to both.'⁵⁷ His account continued with him telling Windels that he wished to go himself, feeling 'in my inner mind that in all probability the letter or rather the reply was meant to open the way to this.' The one complication he foresaw was that he wished to hold a general election and he did not wish to embroil the visit in controversy of a party political nature. He confided in his diary his belief 'that "forces unseen" – loved ones in the beyond – were working out these plans.' He decided that he should contact Chamberlain, and further fantasised that this might lead to a royal visit to Germany, where he could accompany Their Majesties as Minister in Attendance, as he had done to the United States.

He duly sent a private and confidential letter to Chamberlain on 24 July, requesting that the contents be kept between themselves as much as possible, reminding the latter of the Canadian leader's visit to Hitler at Berchtesgaden in 1937, and asking advice as to how to

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2 September 1939, p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 10 September 1939, p. 4.

⁵⁵ See Chapter 4.

⁵⁶ TNA, DO/121/63/Correspondence between the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (Mr. Neville Chamberlain) and the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Mackenzie King) – Possible visit by Canadians to Germany, Mackenzie King to Chamberlain, 24 July 1939, pp. 4 – 6.

⁵⁷ King, *Diary*, 21 July 1939.

respond to the offer, although he did not mention his plans to go himself.⁵⁸ In his diary the next day, Mackenzie King hoped this communication would open 'a way to effective conciliation.'⁵⁹ Chamberlain's response was sent *en clair* on 7 August.⁶⁰ He suggested that the offer should be accepted as soon as possible, that (for unspecified reasons) October would be preferable, that too much should not be expected from this gesture, but that if it went ahead, perhaps he could give some further advice as to how the party could achieve the maximum benefit from the occasion. Mackenzie King again saw this as deeply significant, describing himself in his diary for 10 August as being 'struck at once by the fact that this came on the 20th Anniversary of the day I was chosen leader of the party.'⁶¹ His diary further reveals that, having discussed the matter with Lapointe the following day, he decided that the invitation should be accepted, but chose November rather than October, to make sure the prospective election would be over.⁶² The same entry indicates he lost no time in informing Windels of this, and that the Canadian leader reaffirmed that he would wish to lead the party himself. He then advised Chamberlain of what he had done, but again, not his own proposed participation, in a secret telegram of 16 August.⁶³

This was not Mackenzie King's only attempt at personal intervention over the course of the summer. With the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, he described in his diary for 25 August how he was again moved to send another personal message to Hitler.⁶⁴ Lapointe concurred, but other members of cabinet were less impressed. However with his deputy's backing the Canadian leader felt able to overrule them. Having decided to send messages to both Germany and Italy, he was then persuaded by Dr. Windels to extend one to Poland as well, in order to appear more impartial. He took the opportunity to remind Dr. Windels of their conversation in February, where he had said that Canada would stand by Britain in circumstances such as these and confirmed this continued to be the government's position.⁶⁵ Later, working out the times in his diary, he convinced himself that his message

⁵⁸ TNA, DO/121/63/Correspondence between the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (Mr. Neville Chamberlain) and the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Mackenzie King) – Possible visit by Canadians to Germany, Mackenzie King to Chamberlain, 24 July 1939, pp. 1 – 9.

⁵⁹ King, *Diary*, 25 July 1939, p. 3.

⁶⁰ TNA, DO/121/63/Correspondence between the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (Mr. Neville Chamberlain) and the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Mackenzie King) – Possible visit by Canadians to Germany, Chamberlain to Mackenzie King, 7 August 1939.

⁶¹ King, *Diary*, 10 August 1939, p. 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 11 August 1939, p. 7.

⁶³ TNA, DO/121/63/Correspondence between the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (Mr. Neville Chamberlain) and the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Mackenzie King) – Possible visit by Canadians to Germany, Mackenzie King to Chamberlain, 16 August 1939.

⁶⁴ King, *Diary*, 25 August 1939, p. 3.

⁶⁵ For their previous conversation, see Ch. 5, above.

could have arrived in time to have played a part in Hitler's decision to cancel his orders to attack Poland on 26 August:

it is interesting that it [Mackenzie King's message] reached there [Germany] before the time at which the change was made in Hitler's plans. It is quite conceivable that it might have come into Von Ribbentrop's hands and that he, with his associations with Canada in mind, may have had something to with bringing it to the Feuhrer's [sic] attention at night.⁶⁶

At this point he also recorded his idea of having the King and Queen make an appeal to Hitler as well and how he had cabled Chamberlain and Massey to this effect. When he had informed the Governor-General of what he had done, the latter had 'thought it right for Canada to advise the King.' This somewhat surprising statement from an unashamed imperialist was perhaps less so for one in favour of a Scottish Parliament.⁶⁷ Mackenzie King had not actually done this, instead, as he noted in his diary, framing it 'as a suggestion for the British government.'⁶⁸ He now seemed to rather regret this, although he consoled himself that 'it was a preparing of the ground.' Neither of them seemed to consider what the consequences would have been, of the King receiving advice from his ministers as King of Canada, which was incompatible with the advice that he was receiving from his ministers as King of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as would have been the case. No doubt it would have been a case of 'one monarch being responsible to two parliaments, and tending to follow the dictates of the larger.'⁶⁹ However, the Canadian leader's diary for 27 August indicates that while apparently appreciative, Chamberlain did not think the proposal viable at that point.⁷⁰ Mackenzie King still allowed himself to believe that his interventions might be of some personal significance as well, hoping in his journal the following day that 'Hitler may agree to or suggest me as one of a tribunal or body to which some matters may be referred for adjustment.'⁷¹ On 29 August, the Canadian leader finally drew his personal interventions to a close, by confirming to the German Consul that, in the circumstances, the proposed German trip would have to be put on hold for the present, scrupulously recording this decision in his diary.⁷²

⁶⁶ King, *Diary*, 26 August 1939, p. 2.

⁶⁷ John M. MacKenzie, 'Essay and Reflection: On Scotland and the Empire' in *The International History Review*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Nov., 1993), p. 737.

⁶⁸ King, *Diary*, 26 August 1939, p.5.

⁶⁹ John M. MacKenzie's characterisation of one of the principal difficulties identified by historians such as T. C. Smout and Bruce Lenman in having a single monarch govern Scotland and England prior to the Act of Union in MacKenzie, 'Essay and Reflection', p. 728.

⁷⁰ King, *Diary*, 27 August 1939, p. 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 28 August 1939, p. 1.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 29 August 1939, pp. 2 - 3.

The Neutrality Crisis

On 13 September Sir William Clark sat down to write a report for Anthony Eden, the new Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in London on the crisis that had erupted in South Africa as a result of the outbreak of war in Europe.⁷³ He explained that Smuts and Hertzog had not communicated since Parliament had broken up in June, as the latter had retired to his farm in the country to nurse his wife. Thereafter he had only been in touch with Pirow who had paid him a brief (undated) visit prior to 26 August, when the Prime Minister had returned to Pretoria. Clark advised that this return had been prompted by the necessity of extending the life of the Senate, which was about to expire, so that Parliament could remain in being, in case of need, while crisis conditions persisted in Europe. Unbeknownst to the High Commissioner, while there, Hertzog had received a desperate appeal from Te Water to intercede with London in what the latter felt might well prove to be the last opportunity to prevent a slide into war.⁷⁴ As this was the last thing he wanted, the Prime Minister had accordingly dashed off a plea to London to press Poland 'to be helpful in arriving at solution of Danzig and Corridor question.'⁷⁵ Clark again took up the tale with Hertzog's departure from Pretoria, describing how he spent the next six days motoring down to Capetown, arriving on 1 September, by which stage it was apparent both that war was at hand and the consensus that had prevailed in the government at the end of April no longer obtained.⁷⁶

The day Hertzog arrived in Capetown, Te Water informed the South African leader that Britain was about to ask Hitler to withdraw from Poland, that this would amount to an ultimatum, and that 'it can be accepted for practical purposes that Great Britain will be at war with Germany on its receipt, which will be shortly after 5 p.m. this afternoon.'⁷⁷ The same day, a cable from London advised Hertzog that the British Ambassador in Rome 'has received official and most secret assurance from Ciano that Italy will not fight against this country or France.'⁷⁸ Hertzog's preferred policy of preventing war had therefore been superseded by events and the threat of a co-ordinated Axis bid to dominate the world, which had seemed so imminent in April, had also now clearly receded into the background. In the circumstances, as he told Clark (who duly included it in his report to Eden), he saw no South African interest in Danzig and the Corridor, any more than he had in the Sudetenland the

⁷³ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60, Clark to Eden, 13 September 1939, p. 13.

⁷⁴ NASA, SAB/BTS/1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Te Water to Hertzog, 25 August, 1939, p. 3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Hertzog to Te Water, 26 August 1939.

⁷⁶ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60, Clark to Eden, 13 September 1939, p. 2.

⁷⁷ NASA, SAB/BTS/1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Te Water to Hertzog, 1 September, 1939.

⁷⁸ NASA, SAB/BTS/1/4/12/German Foreign Policy, Inskip to Hertzog, 1 September 1939.

previous year.⁷⁹ He accordingly reverted to his less favoured option, a policy of neutrality; in order, as he saw it, to preserve the Union's status as a sovereign, independent entity. His deputy, Smuts, however, had formed a different view of South African interests, overcoming his dislike of the Polish guarantee and overlooking the reduced Axis threat implied by Italy's flight into neutrality, to support the Union's participation in war with Germany, making a collision virtually inevitable.

A suggestion that the Union could remain neutral while severing relations with Germany, failed to provide a policy the cabinet could unite around.⁸⁰ On Saturday, 2 September, as Clark recounted in his report to London, he had cabled Chamberlain, in response to an enquiry from Smuts, to ask the British Prime Minister to send Hertzog a personal message in the hope that this might save the situation.⁸¹ The report continued that, the following day, cabinet carried on its discussions in an effort to find a way out of the deadlock. The High Commissioner also made a point of seeing the Governor-General, Sir Patrick Duncan, whom he encouraged in his view that granting Hertzog a dissolution of Parliament, if the Prime Minister suffered a defeat in the House of Assembly, while most likely constitutionally correct, would not be 'in the public interest.' Hertzog anyway seemed to anticipate at worst a small victory, which would leave him without a working majority, in which case Sir Patrick could see no way to refuse him a dissolution. In this, Clark, as he admitted, was reluctantly forced to agree.

The High Commissioner recounted that he was unable to deliver Chamberlain's message to Hertzog until the morning of Monday, 4 September, when it failed to move the South African from his position that this war was not his country's concern, although he was more than happy to give Britain 'the most favourable treatment possible within the limits of neutrality.' The Prime Minister thereafter went to a final cabinet meeting and then on to the House to propose his neutrality resolution. There, in Clark's view, Hertzog made two fatal errors in speaking in *Afrikaans* and defending Hitler, which would both have helped to drive the undecided into the Smuts camp. The High Commissioner contrasted this with the other side's behaviour, where, although the *Afrikaner* Smuts spoke in English, his seconder, the Anglophone Chief Whip, Colonel Collins, spoke in *Afrikaans*, demonstrating their side's respect for both traditions. According to Clark, considerable lobbying went on behind the scenes, and Smuts's supporters became concerned at the success the Hertzogites were having

⁷⁹ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60, Clark to Eden, 13 September 1939, p. 6.

⁸⁰ NASA, *Te Water Papers* (A78), Vol.13/Correspondence/ Te Water to Hertzog, 1 September 1939; Oswald Pirow, *Hertzog*, p. 246.

⁸¹ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60, Clark to Eden, 13 September 1939.

in persuading waverers that if the neutrality proposition was lost, the Prime Minister would simply obtain a dissolution from Duncan. The electoral system favoured *Afrikaners*, meaning that would-be opponents, even if they won the debate in the House, would face another risk of losing their privileges as members of the ruling party, and possibly their seats as well.⁸² Clark reported how he was able to arrest this development, when approached by one of Smuts's proxies, by confirming there would be no dissolution if the Prime Minister was defeated.⁸³ In the event Smuts won the division with a majority of thirteen.

Hertzog then saw the Governor-General, advising him, as expected, to dissolve Parliament, according to Duncan's private record of the crisis.⁸⁴ The latter's response was that an election risked domestic instability, and that the policy the government had taken to the people in the last one was that Parliament would decide. Parliament had now decided and if Smuts could form a government, then there was no good reason to go to the country again. Hertzog, who seems to have been deflated by his unexpected defeat, did not even argue the point that constitutionally he had a right to have his advice accepted and took his leave. Smuts thereafter confirmed to Duncan that he could form a government and the Prime Minister accordingly resigned the following morning, 5 September, to be succeeded by his former deputy the next day.

Epilogue

The dominions each managed to find a different way to enter the war. Australia followed the doctrine of the indivisibility of the Crown, which held that if the King was at war on behalf of one of his dominions, then he had to be at war on behalf of all of them. Menzies therefore simply announced over the radio that 'in consequence of a persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war on her and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.'⁸⁵ In Wellington, the government heard the news of the outbreak of war over the radio, as a communications gridlock in London delayed the transmission of the relevant

⁸² See Chapter One, above.

⁸³ UCT, *Sir William Clark Papers* (BC81), D60, Clark to Eden, 13 September 1939..

⁸⁴ UCT, *Sir Patrick Duncan Papers* (BC294), J2, Sir Patrick Duncan 'Untitled Memorandum ctd.', 4 September 1939, p. 3.

⁸⁵ National Film and Sound Archive Online, 'Declaration of War Speech by the Rt. Hon. R. G. Menzies' [Title No. 188388], 3 September 1939, <http://colsearch.nfsa.gov.au/nfsa/search/display/display.w3p;adv=;group=;groupequals=;holdingType=digital%3D5;page=0;parentid=;query=Id%3A387919%7CId%3A188388%7CId%3A188391%7CId%3A384854%7CId%3A516927%7CId%3A516932%7CId%3A516930%7CId%3A516935%7CId%3A384810%7CId%3A384825%7CId%3A384852%7CId%3A384862;querytype=;rec=1;resCount=10>.

cables.⁸⁶ Cabinet and the leading civil servants had met from 11 p.m. local time to declare war, backdating it to coincide with Britain's, then seeking Parliamentary endorsement for their action afterwards.⁸⁷ In South Africa, Parliament had divided over the issue, bringing down the sitting Prime Minister in the process; and his successor now advised the Governor-General to declare war on behalf of the King, which Duncan duly did on 6 September 1939.⁸⁸ In Canada, the government proclaimed a state of 'apprehended war' on 1 September, which they backdated to 25 August, because, according to the Prime Minister's diary, this was when they had 'decided to purchase aeroplanes, and made other appropriations under G. G.'s warrants.'⁸⁹ Mackenzie King then described how Parliament was summoned for 7 September at his behest, to demonstrate Canada's independence in entering the war.⁹⁰ The Prime Minister also obtained cabinet's approval for having the King make the declaration, rather than the Governor-General as had happened in the other dominions.⁹¹ He recounted in his journal, how on 9 September, after a two day debate, Parliament approved the government's policy that Canada should declare war, but it was not until the following day, Sunday, 10 September, that the King's signature could be obtained.⁹² The differences might be cosmetic, but, rather than being evidence of the solidarity of the British Commonwealth, the dominions' entry into the war actually showed the diverging nature of its major components.

⁸⁶ NLNZ, *Bassett Papers* 2000-94-02/interview of Sir Alister McIntosh by Mark King 12 September 1978, p. 35

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸⁸ NASA, SAB/BTS/1/4/6/ South African Declaration of War, Proclamation by Governor-General, 6 September 1939; *Ibid.*, Minister of External Affairs to the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the German Reich, Pretoria, 6 September 1939. The declaration of war was duly communicated to the German representative in the Union the same day. Pretoria neglected to inform its representatives abroad, however, so both Te Water in London and Gie in Berlin had to desperately telegraph the Department of External Affairs for instructions as to what to communicate to their host governments. *Ibid.*, Te Water to Smuts, 7 September 1939; *Ibid.*, Gie to Smuts, 8 September 1939.

⁸⁹ King, *Diary*, 1 September 1939, p. 2.

⁹⁰ *Idem.* They had originally planned a full week's interval, but Mackenzie King felt that 7 September was a more auspicious day: 'I like the "7" as a day for Parliament to re-assemble.'

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9 September 1939, p. 1 & 2. This was both for reasons of national status and because it would be important for Quebec, as 'the Catholic Church attached great importance to authority, and that they were sure to be influenced more by a proclamation coming out in the name of the King than in the name of the G. G.'

⁹² *Ibid.*, 10 September 1939, p. 2. Canada's actual entry into the war was taken to be not the time of signature, but the later time of publication in the Official Gazette, in order to try to obtain an order of planes from the U. S. before the latter country's neutrality laws came into effect. Unfortunately, the planes remained in Montana at the time of publication and Mackenzie King did not want to push his luck with his neighbour.

CONCLUSION

New Zealand was forced to abandon its 'moral foreign policy' and commitment to collective security, after the Munich Settlement finally destroyed what small hope had remained for these. Wellington was instead forced to rely on British power to supplement their own meagre forces. Culturally, the country had also long displayed a close affinity with the British. Their dependency was compounded by economic factors: the dominion's overseas trade was overwhelmingly committed to British markets, and, even more importantly, the government was reliant on British goodwill to obtain the finance necessary to fund its flagship welfare reforms. It therefore had little scope to take an independent line in foreign policy between Munich and the outbreak of war. The Munich settlement itself, by failing to dispel international tensions, only exacerbated this tendency. Wellington sought quietly to strengthen their defences, reach out to Britain and Australia through the proposed Pacific Defence conference, and affirm their claim to their mandate over Western Samoa, while minimising their acceptance of external obligations. *Kristallnacht* confirmed New Zealand in its existing commitment to defence and disapproval of the Nazi regime, but failed to inspire a relaxation of immigration controls, with the result that shamefully few refugees were accepted in the wake of the pogrom. The 'war scare' of January – March 1939 found the government distracted by its domestic difficulties and with few options for intervention, with the consequence it did little beyond continuing with the measures already initiated. Similarly, Hitler's seizure of the remainder of Czecho-Slovakia inspired no comment. It was only when London subsequently dismissed Moscow's proposal for a conference that Wellington felt obliged to act. The actual meeting suggested bore no resemblance to the type of gathering that the New Zealand government had previously put forward, and still clearly remained committed to. Nevertheless, in line with their predilection for collective security, they plainly wished to see as broad a base as possible for any anti-aggression front that could be arranged. They therefore tried to push the British into rethinking their decision on the Soviet scheme, and also into involving the United States more directly. They welcomed the Polish guarantee (although with the caveat that they felt more should have been done for Czechoslovakia), but felt this made it even more necessary that Russian assistance be obtained. When the unthinkable happened, and the Soviets instead reached an agreement with the Nazis, Wellington took the opportunity to reaffirm its solidarity with London. Sentiment, security, economics, and a lack of viable alternatives rendered this their only

option. When war came, the government took the decision to declare war, backdating it to coincide with Britain's, and seeking Parliamentary approval for their action afterwards.

In Australia, the leadership issue coloured their response to European developments. As long as Joe Lyons, with his pacifist inclinations, was in power, he would act as a brake on any warlike tendencies. New Zealand's proposal for a Pacific Defence Conference therefore met an unenthusiastic response. Billy Hughes, the bellicose Minister for External Affairs, however, strongly asserted the dominion's commitment to its mandate over New Guinea, and Lyons's deputy, Page, in line with his own agenda, was, however, able to use the continuing sense of insecurity in the wake of Munich to persuade the Prime Minister to adopt centralised planning to improve security, which would have the side-effect of benefiting Page's supporters. This latter endeavour foundered on the states' intransigence at the Premiers' conference on 21 October 1938. Canberra remained committed to improving its defences, however, boosting the militia to 75,000 and ordering a squadron of seaplanes for reconnaissance of the country's northern shores. *Kristallnacht* inspired immediate revulsion, in the same way as in the other dominions, but also did not change attitudes, either with regard to refugees or external relations. As in New Zealand, the government was immersed in its own internal difficulties at the time of the 'war scare.' Nonetheless, Billy Hughes, lost no opportunity to assert the gravity of the situation, thereby boosting his portfolio's stature, and, by extension, his own. Internally matters came to a head with the resignation of Bob Menzies, the Attorney-General, citing concerns with defence as well as national insurance as reasons for so doing, while Hitler marched into Prague. The British High Commissioner, who knew Menzies well, was convinced, however, that these were just pretexts and that the Attorney-General had been merely looking for an excuse to openly break with Lyons in pursuit of the leadership. Hughes, benefiting from his increased stature, acquired Menzies's portfolio as well as his own, and was able to use the increased international tension to push the cabinet in a more hawkish direction. Naturally, he welcomed the British government's new policy after Prague, although he was inclined to read rather more into it than was actually intended. Page also benefited from Hitler's move as the states were no longer prepared to stand in the way of the Deputy Prime Minister's plans at the Premier's conference of 31 March 1939. Lyons's sudden death as the Italians seized Albania only strengthened Hughes's hand, but this was a temporary victory, as, despite a creditable showing, he came second to Menzies in the resulting leadership contest.

Menzies was determined to have his own man in charge of foreign policy, and, in consolation for taking the external affairs portfolio from him, promoted Hughes to Deputy Prime Minister. The leadership issue remained unresolved, however. Hughes, Casey, and most importantly Page remained unreconciled to Menzies's leadership. Page took his party out of coalition, citing the new Prime Minister's war record and his treatment of Lyons, leaving Menzies to head a minority administration. While domestically weak, in external relations Menzies had moved away from the appeasement he had adopted over the Sudetenland in 1938. While his harder line can be traced to his strategy over the leadership, Prague can only have confirmed him in this stance. He favoured an agreement with the Soviets, but only in Europe, in case it drove the Japanese further into the arms of the Axis. He was also adamant that there should be no new Munich over Poland, even if he suggested the Poles should endeavour not to appear inflexible for the sake of public opinion. Like New Zealand, sentiment, security, and economics mandated participation when war came. While Menzies recognised this, and that appeasement's time was past, he was in the awkward position of heading a minority administration dependent on the support of Page, who hated him, and with a questionable war record behind him. Fortunately for the Prime Minister, invoking the indivisibility of the crown meant he would not have to meet Parliament until the country was already at war. This meant any pre-existing appetite for asking awkward questions about Menzies's fitness to lead Australia in a time of conflict, was likely to be drowned in a wave of patriotic fervour.

General Hertzog had two overriding objectives: to make clear his country's independent sovereignty; and, if at all possible, to preserve his partnership with English South Africa as well. Participating in a war simply because Britain was, would invalidate the first, but failure to do so would jeopardise the second. Hertzog therefore sought to do whatever he could to prevent the British falling into war, and, if this failed, to take what steps he could to alleviate the negative consequences of neutrality. In his view, supporters followed their leader, so as tensions had mounted in Europe, he had presented General Smuts, the *de facto* leader of English South Africa, with a virtual ultimatum in the form of the Neutrality Pact in September 1938. Outmanoeuvred, Smuts had been faced with either committing himself to accepting neutrality in advance over eastern Europe or breaking the Fusion regime over the issue. Smuts had not believed war over the Sudetenland was justified, but more importantly he had not believed it would happen, and so he had accepted Hertzog's proposal. The Munich settlement had prevented this from being put to the test.

The settlement had not, however, convinced the South Africans peace had been firmly re-established and they continued to strengthen their defences, while seeking a way to buy off any residual German interest in South-West Africa. *Kristallnacht* briefly united the government in indignation against Germany, but as elsewhere this did not translate into practical assistance for the refugees created by the pogrom, although the Minister of Defence, Oswald Pirow, tried to no avail to strike a headline-stealing deal with Hitler over the Jews, during his visit to Europe. In the New Year, Smuts had reversed his views on the probability of war, although his conviction that it would erupt out of Mussolini's ambitions in the Spanish Civil War would prove to be quite incorrect. Despite his later claim that it was Prague which convinced him that Hitler needed to be stopped, at the time he remained much more concerned about what would happen in Iberia. At the same time, Hertzog, in line with his aim of keeping Britain out of war, tried to persuade London to give Germany another final chance. Both he and Smuts were shocked by Britain's guarantee to Poland, which made war much more likely and therefore threatened the cohesion of the Fusion regime. Mussolini rescued their consensus temporarily by invading Albania, thus making it look like the Axis were acting in unison. This brought the danger sufficiently close to home to constitute a threat to South African interests from both Hertzog's and Smuts's points of view. Once negotiations with Russia commenced, both appear to have accepted it was preferable these reach a successful conclusion, although Hertzog urged that this should then be seen as an opportunity to once more reach out to Germany. When instead the Soviets signed an agreement with Germany, he likewise tried to persuade the British this provided a chance to seek an accommodation with Hitler.

Neither he nor Smuts had any enthusiasm for the arrangements with Poland. Therefore, when the Prime Minister learned that Germany had attacked Poland and that Italy was going to be neutral, he sought to keep his country out of the war. Smuts, however, believed South Africa's future lay as an integral part of the Commonwealth, a destiny from which neutrality would sunder her. He had only agreed to the Neutrality Pact because he could not then believe that the European powers would go to war. He had since become convinced otherwise. Hitler's march into Prague now provided him with a pretext for changing his stance, even though it had not much mattered to him at the time. Once hostilities started, he was as determined on participation as Hertzog was on neutrality. In Parliament, the Prime Minister's hubris in speaking in *Afrikaans* and defending Hitler undoubtedly alienated waverers who might have been tempted to support him, and he lost the vote. His past eagerness to have a 'South African' as Governor-General, then proved his undoing. He had

chosen Sir Patrick Duncan, a politician who had spent his entire career promoting the Anglo-South African connection, in an attempt to reconcile the English community to this development. Like Smuts, although Sir Patrick disliked the Polish connection, he felt the Union's future lay with the British Commonwealth, and therefore had a very different conception as to where 'the public interest' rested to Hertzog. This was unlike the more traditional kind of Governor-General, who had only a transient connection with his dominion and an absolute priority of keeping the office out of politics. Duncan was, however, prepared to court controversy in the service of the greater good. Hence, when the Prime Minister approached Duncan to dissolve Parliament, his request was refused, and he was replaced by Smuts, who proceeded to take South Africa into the war. Hertzog's most visible success came back to haunt him in the end.

In Canada, the Munich Agreement had convinced Mackenzie King that a new era of peace had dawned. While having no mandates to reaffirm, or not reaffirm, their claim to govern, the Canadians did overturn a resolution to order additional planes, making them the only dominion to rescind a defence measure in the aftermath of the crisis. Despite acknowledging a debt to the Czechs over the Sudetenland, Ottawa like the other dominions, simply displayed self-interest in its dealings with Prague. It did admit the Sudeten Aryan German Democrats, but only once it had decided these refugees would make a positive contribution to their adopted country, not because it was under any moral obligation to do so. Surprisingly, *Kristallnacht* did have a much greater impact here than elsewhere. This did not relate to the treatment of refugees, as, although the quixotic Mackenzie King wanted to adopt a more generous policy for the admission of Jews in the immediate aftermath of the pogrom, his commitment to this was gradually ground down by his colleagues. The pogrom did, however, shatter his belief that Munich had firmly cemented peace. Canada looked again to its defensive arrangements and started to rearm. Mackenzie King also sought to psychologically prepare the country for a possible war, and, as part of this, repeated his predecessor Sir Wilfrid Laurier's 1910 remark that 'when England is at war, Canada is at war.' This drew much criticism both from officials at the Department of External Affairs and from Quebec. Mackenzie King was deeply sensitive to such expressions of disapproval, and therefore leaped on the reports causing 'the war scare' as vindication of what he had said. Like Smuts, he had already been pessimistic, these reports had not caused his pessimism. However, unlike Smuts, he rapidly recovered his optimism and instead developed an abiding scepticism about the reliability of the British Foreign Office. He was not particularly distressed or concerned by the seizure of Prague, but nonetheless recognised war remained a

possibility, and continued to attempt to ready the people for it. He was horrified by British engagement with the countries of eastern Europe. Far from wanting consultation, he was relieved not to have been consulted on this. He also disliked involvement with Russia both because he thought it would increase tension, and because of how it would play in Quebec, but equally feared that, once negotiations had been embarked on, their failure would only make matters worse. He was, nevertheless, relieved by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, believing that Britain would now have to come to a settlement with Germany, albeit on Hitler's terms. He had never liked the Polish connection and continued to rail against them, even after he had led his country into war on their behalf.

The political consensus was that if war came, Anglophone popular opinion would sweep the country into participation, regardless of what the politicians wished. Mackenzie King had, in any case, no such inclination. He convinced himself that he would be embarking on a war for freedom, which it would be shameful to avoid. This seems to be a remarkable piece of self-deception. Whenever an opportunity presented itself to make a stand for freedom, whether over the Sudetenland, Prague, or Poland, Mackenzie King was steadfast in his support of appeasement, reasoning that it was better to sacrifice these unknown people in faraway lands than risk war. He was only determined on participation when it was Britain that was involved in defence of freedom. Nor, to complicate matters, was he always motivated by British involvement alone, on the contrary, he was determined to avoid writing 'a blank cheque' which any British administration could draw on, regardless of circumstances. He was only interested in wars when it appeared Britain would be involved, and her freedom, not freedom generally, would be at stake. He advocated appeasement over the Sudetenland and Poland, because British freedom was not at stake, but when Britain did, or seemed likely to, take up arms, he was wholehearted in his support, because then her liberty did appear at risk. Allowing himself to admit that would, however, have involved acknowledging he had more in common with 'jingoists and Tories' than he cared to recognise, so he took refuge in his self-depiction of the defence of freedom. In parallel with this self-deception was Mackenzie King's messianic belief that he had been selected by supernatural powers to bring about peace. Thus, he congratulated himself that he had brought about the Munich Agreement through his personal relationships with Chamberlain and Hitler. He also persuaded himself that a personal letter to Hitler during 'the war scare,' recalling their meeting in 1937, would make a significant contribution to the easing of international tension. Despite taking nearly six months to arrive, Hitler's reply, inviting twelve Canadians to visit Germany, merely confirmed the Canadian leader in the belief that he had been selected to

play a special part, and he determined to lead the party itself. Only the outbreak of hostilities prevented him from going. Moreover, following the Nazi-Soviet pact, he felt inspired to write to first Hitler, then Mussolini, and finally the Polish president in a bid to avert war, persuading himself that his message might well have been behind Hitler's decision to call off the invasion of Poland scheduled for 26 August, because Ribbentrop, with his Canadian connections, would have brought it to the *Führer's* attention. His suggestion that the King and Queen should make an appeal to Hitler fortunately went to Chamberlain, rather than the Palace, thus preventing a constitutional crisis at the worst possible time. Despite his ability for self-deception and flights of fancy, Mackenzie King seems to have had an unconscious survival instinct, which prevented him from taking these too far. However, he rationalised it, he believed Canada's participation to be necessary, and when war broke out, there was no question what his response would be, however much he deplored its necessity.

Ernest Lapointe's thinking was less convoluted, but had more practical significance. He saw everything through the prism of Quebec. Like Smuts, he had never believed the Sudetenland would lead to war, and so had sought to restrain his quixotic leader from making any rash commitments which would fare badly in the province. Quebec's latent anti-Semitism coloured his reaction to *Kristallnacht*, leading him to argue against more generous treatment of the refugees streaming from Germany. He was as sceptical about 'the war scare' as he had been about the Sudetenland, and sought to combine with Dr. Skelton, the isolationist permanent head of the Department of External Affairs, to hold Mackenzie King back and encourage him in his doubts about the dire reports from London. Prague changed all this. Lapointe could now see that war was a distinct possibility. He accepted that popular sentiment in Anglophone Canada made participation mandatory, and that if Quebec objected, Quebec would be swept aside, and all he had striven for would be lost. He also accepted that public opinion in his province needed to be prepared for this eventuality. Therefore, even knowing about the Polish guarantee, he delivered a rousing speech on 31 March 1939, waking his fellow *Quebecois* to this prospect. Thereafter, he only balked once at the prospect of broadcasting on 3 September 1939, about Canada's position, complaining that his people would come to see him as the voice of war, and even then, he allowed himself to be talked round, as Mackenzie King noted in his diary.¹ Lapointe's change of heart did not make the difference between Canadian participation or not, but it did ensure that Canada's entry would be a smooth ride. He prepared his province's public opinion, ensured cabinet opposition was insignificant, and provided the Prime Minister with much needed psychological support.

¹King, *Diary*, 3 September 1939, p. 2.

Sentiment, security and economics undoubtedly played their part in the dominions' perception of European events. Patriotic feeling, apart from among the *Afrikaner* and *Quebecois* communities, still bound the dominions to Britain. Australia and New Zealand still depended on Britain's Singapore strategy to protect them from Japan; South Africa relied on British command of the seas to protect their trade and their mandate over South-West Africa; while even Canada depended on British influence to offset that of its over-mighty neighbour to the south. Economically, they all continued to be tied to the British market. Domestic difficulties in Australia and New Zealand, as well as the racial tensions in Canada and South Africa, referred to above, also played a part in forming views of Europe.

Nonetheless, events in Europe themselves had a significant impact on dominion thinking between 1 October 1938 and 11 September 1939. Munich led Canada to believe that a new era of peace had dawned, but failed to convince Australia and South Africa, while it pushed New Zealand into shelving its 'moral foreign policy.' *Kristallnacht* forced Canada to think again and confirmed the others in their scepticism. 'The war scare' temporarily boosted the hawkish tendency among the dominion leaderships, but in the longer term encouraged doubts as to London's judgement, except for General Smuts, as the episode confirmed him in the pessimism he already felt at the impending end to the Spanish Civil War. The 'March into Prague' convinced Ernest Lapointe that war could no longer be discounted, leading him to reverse his stance on preparing Canada for this eventuality, and ensuring that Canada's entry would be much easier than would have otherwise been the case. The guarantees pleased only New Zealand and Billy Hughes in Australia, who would soon be shunted sideways in a cabinet reshuffle. The Canadians and South Africans feared they merely made war more likely, threatening the latter's domestic unity in the process. Albania, however, seemed to imply a global Axis threat, which temporarily restored the Union's fragile consensus. Anglo-Soviet talks initially only drew an enthusiastic response from Wellington, with the others reluctantly falling into line later, out of fear that failure would simply increase the risk of hostilities. Nevertheless, the Nazi-Soviet Pact struck Ottawa and Pretoria, but not Canberra and Wellington, as creating an opportunity for the British to reach out to Germany. When hostilities broke out, the news of Italian neutrality tore apart the unity of the Fusion regime in South Africa. Hertzog was convinced the Union's interests demanded neutrality, while Smuts held the contrary view, leading the latter to overthrow the former. The others each found their own way to enter the war. The distant drums of Europe had played their part in bringing about dominion participation.

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Appendix

Dramatis Personae, 1 October 1938 – 11 September 1939

❖ Germany

➤ Members of the Nazi regime

- Adolf Hitler - German Dictator
- Joachim von Ribbentrop - German Foreign Minister, loathed, and loathed by
- Herman Goering - held many offices under the Nazi regime. Among the most significant for this thesis were the posts of Minister of Aviation, Minister of Economics and Head of the Organisation for the Four Year Plan, loathed, and loathed by
- Dr. Joseph Goebbels - Minister for Propaganda and Public Enlightenment. His attempt to curry favour with Hitler through *Kristallnacht* (in the wake of his fall from grace through his affair with the Czech actress Lida Baarova) may have succeeded in its aim, but ratcheted up international tension in a way which was felt even as far afield as the dominions.
- Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, former Minister of Economics in the Nazi government, at the beginning of this thesis he remained President of the Reichsbank. Widely viewed as a stabilising element in the regime, his dismissal from the latter post on 19 January 1939 would contribute significantly to the sense of crisis which developed towards the end of that month

➤ Members of the Diplomatic Corps

- Sir Nevile Henderson, British Ambassador to Germany. Dying of cancer, Henderson is now widely seen as having been prepared to concede too much in his desire to achieve a stable arrangement between Britain and Germany.
- Dr. Stefanus Gie, simultaneously South African Minister to Germany and Sweden, largely based in Berlin. Considered himself to be 'of one mind' with Henderson during the Sudeten Crisis.

❖ Britain

➤ Members of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom

- Neville Chamberlain, First Lord of the Treasury
- Edward Wood, Earl of Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs
- Edward Stanley, Lord Stanley, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to 16 October 1938
- Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs 31 October 1938 – 29 January 1939
- Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for Co-Ordination of Defence to 29 January 1939, subsequently Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs 29 January – 3 September 1939, thereafter Lord High Chancellor 3 September 1939 – 12 May 1940

➤ Members of Parliament

- Anthony Eden, formerly Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, he had resigned from the government over differences with Chamberlain over foreign policy and remained an influential focus for dissident opinion in this period
- Leo Amery, formerly Secretary of State for Colonial and Dominion Affairs in the 1920s, he had presided over the department's division into separate colonial and dominion ministries. Despite having apparently concealed his partly Jewish heritage, he was a staunch opponent of appeasement and advocate of rearmament, while continuing to interest himself in imperial matters (including corresponding with Smuts in South Africa).
- Winston Churchill, the most influential of the dissidents, any suggestion of his return to office was likely to be taken as signifying the final abandonment of any attempt to seek a *rapprochement* with Germany.

➤ Dominion Representatives in London

- Stanley Bruce, previously prime minister of Australia in the 1920s, by 1 October 1938 Australian High Commissioner in London. He approved of Chamberlain's efforts to appease Hitler during the Sudeten Crisis, and was prepared to support the British guarantee of rump Czechoslovakia. He would return to Canberra in

the (northern hemisphere) winter of 1938-39 ostensibly for consultations about the international situation, but actually about the possibility of him succeeding Joe Lyons as his country's leader once more.

- John Duncan, Official Secretary at the Australian High Commission in London, and Acting Australian High Commissioner in Bruce's absence.
- Alfred Stirling, Australian Liaison Officer in London. Formerly Bob Menzies's secretary, Stirling was embedded in the British Civil Service and provided a more direct (if lower level) channel of communication between London and Canberra than that provided through the Dominions Office and Australia House.
- Vincent Massey, Canadian High Commissioner in London, appears to have been discreetly anti-Semitic and was a staunch approver of appeasement. In any case, his hands were largely tied by Mackenzie King, the Canadian prime minister, who only reluctantly conceded Massey could attend meetings at the Dominions Office with the other High Commissioners during the Sudeten Crisis, while remaining adamant that he had no authority to speak on behalf of his government.
- L. B. 'Mike' Pearson, Secretary at the Canadian High Commission and future Prime Minister of Canada. In response to the swell in the number of refugees arising out of Munich and *Kristallnacht*, he would seek to promote Canadian interests by advocating the immigration of refugees with skills and resources likely to be of benefit to their hosts.
- Bill Jordan, New Zealand High Commissioner in London. Given the office to get him out of the way, Jordan displayed a nauseating obsequiousness towards his superiors combined with a ruthless bullying of those unfortunate enough to be subordinated to him. Jordan spent most of the Sudeten Crisis in Geneva on League of Nations business. He remained ideologically convinced that international tensions were the result of stock market interests and instinctively distrustful of the Conservative Party and all its works. However, having been subjected to much criticism in the New Zealand press for advocating a foreign policy at odds with the British government the previous year, and with a general election looming back home, he seems to have reined in his instincts to provide much in the way of critical comment on British policy.
- Sandford, Jordan's stand-in at the High Commissioners' meetings in London. Sandford was extremely reticent during the Sudeten Crisis, probably out of a

combination of his relatively junior status combined with a healthy fear of his unreasonably difficult boss.

- Sir Cecil Day, New Zealand Liaison Officer. Formerly the Governor-General's secretary in Wellington, he was the counterpart to Australia's Stirling, providing a direct channel of communication from Whitehall departments to Wellington which cut out the Dominions Office and New Zealand House.
- Charles te Water, South African High Commissioner in London. A devoted follower of General Hertzog, the South African prime minister, te Water had strongly advocated appeasement in the interest of his country and party's unity during the Sudeten Crisis.

❖ Australia

➤ Members of His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia

- Joe Lyons, prime minister and leader of the United Australia Party (UAP) until his sudden death on 7 April 1939. Pacifist in sympathy and worn out by the stress of trying to keep his cabinet together, Lyons appeared to be seeking a dignified exit from the political scene.
- Sir Earle Page, deputy prime minister to 7 April 1939, prime minister 7 April – 26 April 1939, minister for commerce, minister for health (both to 26 April 1939) and leader of the Country Party.
- Robert Menzies (UAP), Attorney-General and Minister for Industry to 14 March 1939, Prime Minister from 26 April 1939 through the outbreak of war. Clever, intensely ambitious and extremely talented at making enemies, he remained a divisive figure both before and after becoming prime minister.
- Richard Casey (UAP), Treasurer to 26 April 1939, thereafter Minister for Supply and Development. A protégée of Bruce, the former prime minister and current High Commissioner in London, he had seemed the natural successor to Lyons, but his responsibility for the abandoned National Insurance legislation and his subsequent intrigues for the return of his mentor fatally handicapped his candidature. He remained bitter about his defeat and unsupportive of Menzies's leadership in cabinet.

- Billy Hughes (UAP), Minister for External Affairs to 26 April 1939, Attorney General from 14 March 1939, Menzies also made him deputy leader of the UAP. Already in his 70s, Hughes had previously been prime minister and had signed the Treaty of Versailles for Australia in that capacity. Passionate and combative, he saw no reason why he should not lead his country again despite being at odds with most of his colleagues over his opposition to appeasement, and was prepared to do whatever it took to make this happen. He would lead his party once more (when he was 79) after Menzies was ousted in 1941, but would never be prime minister again.
- Harold Thorby (Country Party), Minister for Defence to November 1938, Minister for Works and Civil Aviation from November 1938 to 26 April 1942. Thorby was a natural fall guy for all the perceived shortcomings in defence. Lacking any military experience, his membership of the Country Party denied him the immunity that the UAP dominated press seemed to extend to members of that party. Accordingly, when Lyons reshuffled his cabinet in November 1938, Thorby was moved sideways to make way for Geoffrey Street, who as a former Brigadier and member of the UAP, lacked the political weaknesses of his predecessor in what had become a very sensitive post.
- Brigadier Geoffrey Street (UAP), Minister for Defence from November 1938.
- Sir Henry Gullett (UAP), Minister for External Affairs from 26 April 1939. 'No one pays any attention to Gullett' as Sir Geoffrey Whiskard, British High Commissioner in Canberra would have it, but Gullett had been an inveterate backbench critic of Lyons on National Insurance and trade policy.

➤ His Majesty's Loyal Opposition

- John Curtin, Leader of the Labor Party, personally friendly with Menzies, this did not prevent him from seeking to exploit the latter's perceived weakness on military matters. Heading a party divided between socially conservative Irish Catholics and Left-wing radicals, Curtin was scarcely in a much stronger position, and sensibly chose to focus his attacks on demanding that Australian preparations should be confined to the defence of Australia, rather than incurring Imperial burdens, as this was an issue on which both wings of his party could be expected to agree.

➤ Diplomatic representatives

- Sir Geoffrey Whiskard, British High Commissioner in Canberra, friendly with both Lyons and Menzies, Whiskard was able to gain considerable insight into the inner workings of both their cabinets

➤ Civil Servants

- Colonel H. V. Hodgson, Permanent Secretary of the Department for External Affairs, having established 'The Permanent Bases of Australian External Policy' for Prime Minister Joe Lyons, Hodgson was easily as influential as, although considerably less well-known than, Carl August Berendsen his counterpart in New Zealand.
- Frederick Shedden, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Defence, nicknamed 'the pocket Hankey' for his aping of Sir Maurice Hankey, the former British Cabinet Secretary and Secretary of the Committee for Imperial Defence.

➤ Members of the State Governments

➤ New South Wales

- Bertram Stevens (UAP), Premier of New South Wales (NSW) to 5 August 1939. Stevens was widely seen as one of the candidates to replace Lyons as Commonwealth Prime Minister. Stevens strongly supported deficit financing which brought him into conflict with the fiscally orthodox Lyons government. However, his deputy, Spooner resigned in July 1939 over an attempt to cut the deficit, and brought forward a confidence motion which Stevens lost by two votes. Spooner failed to benefit from this, however, as Stevens was replaced as Premier by his Treasurer, Alexander Mair.
- Eric Spooner (UAP), NSW Minister for Public Works and Local Government to 21 July 1939, and Deputy Leader of the NSW Parliamentary UAP to August 1939.
- Michael Bruxner (Country Party), NSW Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport. He disliked and distrusted Spooner, effectively blocking him from taking the premiership after the fall of Stevens.

- Alexander Mair (UAP), NSW Treasurer, Premier from 5 August 1939. During 1939, Mair would propose cutting the deficit the coalition government in NSW was incurring, which would lead him into conflict with Spooner, whose portfolio of public works was the source of much of the deficit. When Spooner attempted to reverse the government's new fiscal policy through a confidence motion he brought down Stevens, but was unable to win Bruxner's support. As this would have meant ending the coalition, and the NSW UAP was not prepared to tolerate such a development, Mair was able to establish himself as premier, despite it having been his policy which had just been defeated.

➤ Victoria

- Albert Dunstan (Country Party), Victorian Premier and Treasurer, was head of a minority administration dependent on Labor support.

➤ Queensland

- William Forgan Smith (Labor), Queensland Premier. A pragmatic socialist who, despite his Presbyterian background, allowed the impression to be created that the Queensland Labor Party was the Catholic Church at politics, he remained a determined advocate of states' rights and would eventually resign at what he saw as the over-centralising tendencies of Curtin's wartime Labor administration in Canberra.
- Frank Cooper, Queensland Treasurer. A loyal servant of Forgan Smith, he would ultimately succeed him as Premier on 16 September 1942, after which he would be equally supportive of Curtin, despite his predecessor's difficulties with the latter's centralising tendencies.

➤ South Australia

- Richard Butler (Liberal and Country League), South Australian Premier, the son of a former premier of South Australia, Butler was determined to attract industry to South Australia. Having failed to win a majority in the April 1938 elections, he continued in office with the support of independents, but would be persuaded

to unsuccessfully attempt to break into federal politics in November of that year, which marked the end of his political career.

➤ Western Australia

- Michael Troy (Labor), Deputy Premier and Minister for Lands and Immigration, Western Australia had unsuccessfully attempted to secede in 1933, and Troy appeared very sensitive that Western Australian interests might be subordinated to those of more powerful states in conferences between the central and state governments.

➤ Tasmania

- Albert Ogilvie (Labor), Premier to his sudden death on 10 June 1939, favoured radical financial policies in contrast to the orthodox Lyons administration in Canberra.
- E. J. Ogilvie (Labor), Attorney-General and Minister for Education, Fisheries and Game, brother to the Premier, E. J. Ogilvie strongly advanced the interests of his own portfolios.
- Edward Dwyer-Gray (Labor), Treasurer and Deputy Premier to 10 June 1939, Premier from 10 June 1939 after Ogilvie's sudden death, in agreement with Robert Cosgrove who became Treasurer, before they exchanged offices on 18 December 1939. Dwyer-Gray deliberately cultivated a reputation for fiscal competence, although there is considerable suggestion he was in fact heavily reliant on the capability of his advisors rather than any particular abilities of his own.

❖ Canada

➤ Members of His Majesty's Government in Canada

- William Lyon Mackenzie King (Liberal), Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Mackenzie King was primarily motivated by a desire to maintain Canadian unity, which he saw as principally threatened by separatist tendencies among the *Quebecois*. He hoped to reconcile the latter through a

policy of generous treatment, but was hampered by his inability to speak French and empathise with their socially conservative Catholicism. He therefore relied heavily on his long-term political partner, Ernest Lapointe, a Francophone Catholic from Quebec, to mediate *Quebecois* concerns.

- Ernest Lapointe (Liberal), Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice, Lapointe loyally supported Mackenzie King in return for the latter's prioritising of Francophone Quebec's interests.
- Charles Dunning (Liberal), Minister of Finance, a former rival of Mackenzie King's for the party leadership, Dunning was now seriously ill and would permanently retire from politics in September 1939. He therefore played much less part in political matters than his counterparts in the other dominions.
- Ian Mackenzie (Liberal), Minister of Defence, Mackenzie did not give the impression of being on top of his portfolio, fumbling in cabinet and admitting he did not know which members of his department he could trust. Typically, Mackenzie King was scathing of the minister's abilities in private, but saw no need to replace him with someone more competent, despite the increasing importance of the role in a period of escalating international tensions.
- Thomas Crerar, Minister of Mines and Resources, with ultimate responsibility for immigration.
- Charles 'Chubby' Power (Liberal), Postmaster-General, an Anglophone member of cabinet from Quebec, Mackenzie King consistently favoured Lapointe's views over Power's, even when Power had just come from Quebec and Lapointe was in Geneva, far removed from any access to *Quebecois* opinion in the volatile conditions prevailing at the climax of the Sudeten crisis.

➤ Civil Servants

- Dr. O. D. Skelton, Permanent Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, a convinced isolationist, Skelton was nonetheless very sympathetic to the plight of refugees and argued that they should not be deported into danger simply because they had lied to enter Canada.
- Hume Wrong, Canadian Permanent Delegate to the League of Nations, an isolationist like Skelton, he was the author of a number of internal memoranda arguing this point, and represented Canada at the intergovernmental conference on refugees held at Evian 6 – 15 July 1938.

- Loring Christie, Legal Counsellor at the Department of External Affairs, from 1939, replaced Sir Herbert Marler as Canadian Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the United States, like Skelton and Wrong, Christie was the author of a number of internal isolationist tracts.
- James Gibson, Department of External Affairs Officer
- Frederick Blair, Director of Immigration, Ministry of Mines and Resources, Blair seems to have been tainted with the fashionable anti-Semitism characteristic of the times, but it was his dedicated bureaucratic empire-building, leading to an insistence on pedantic compliance with all the minute requirements of immigration that inhibited the immigration not just of Jewish, but Polish and Spanish refugees during this period.
- Arnold Heeney, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, on becoming Secretary to the Cabinet in 1940, he introduced a system of minute-taking to their deliberations.

➤ Diplomatic Representatives

- Sir Gerald Campbell, British High Commissioner to Canada
- Dr. Erich Windels, German Consul-General

➤ Members of the State Governments

➤ Alberta

- William 'Bible Bill' Aberhart (Social Credit Party of Alberta), Premier of Alberta, exceeded his government's constitutional powers by attempting to take control of the banks and press in his province in 1937, thereby trespassing on Ottawa's territory. Despite Aberhart's overwhelming popularity in Alberta, Mackenzie King had no qualms in contesting the legislation before the Supreme Court of Canada and subsequently the Privy Council, thereby showing that it was only the *Quebecois* he feared to confront.

➤ Quebec

- Maurice Duplessis (*Unione Nazionale*), Premier of Quebec, also exceeded his government's authority in 1937, by passing the so-called 'Padlock Law', which, among other measures, permitted the authorities to lock premises against their owners if they had been used to spread communist propaganda. Despite the law's blatant illegality and violation of liberal principles, Mackenzie King made no attempt to contest it out of fear of the reaction of the *Quebecois* to such a step, in marked contrast to his treatment of the Albertan legislation.

➤ Ontario

- Mitchell Hepburn (Liberal), Premier of Ontario, encouraged by his electoral success in Ontario, Hepburn schemed with Duplessis of Quebec against Mackenzie King, an intrigue which ultimately brought about Hepburn's downfall, but not before Mackenzie King had devoted much time and effort to countering Hepburn's threat to the prime minister's control of his party at the federal level.

❖ New Zealand

➤ Members of His Majesty's Government in New Zealand

- 'The Triumvirate'
- Michael Joseph 'Joe' Savage (Labour), Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs, dying of cancer, Savage, in conjunction with his two colleagues, was desperate to secure the re-election of his government, the stability of its finances, and the implementation of its flagship social security policy.
- Peter Fraser (Labour), Deputy Prime Minister, held a number of other portfolios, most importantly those of Justice, Health and Education, leaving him 'the natural successor' when Savage finally succumbed to his illness in 1940.
- Walter Nash (Labour), Minister of Finance and Customs, dominated the finance function and had overall responsibility for immigration.
- 'The Others'
- Fred Jones (Labour), Minister for Defence, Defence was a sensitive issue as the triumvirate had all opposed the Great War (and Fraser had been imprisoned for

sedition) so they allocated it to Jones, whose lack of military experience and personal pliability meant he would not use his position to embarrass them.

- John 'Jack' Lee (Labour), Minister for Housing, an aggressive and radical MP from the left of the party, Lee would mount a bid to take control of the party, for personal and ideological reasons, after the October 1938 General Election (which Labour won) that would only end with his expulsion from the party in 1940.
- Mark Fagan, Minister without Portfolio and Acting Minister of Customs in 1939 while Nash was overseas, Fagan shared responsibility with the latter for immigration.

➤ Diplomatic Representatives

- Lord Galway, the Governor-General, who uniquely acted as the representative of the King and the British government until the appointment of Sir Harry Batterbee as the first British High Commissioner to New Zealand in April, 1939.
- Sir Harry Batterbee, formerly number two in the Dominions Office, from April 1939 British High Commissioner in Wellington

➤ Civil Servants

- Carl August Berendsen, permanent head of the Prime Minister's Office and the Department for External Affairs, presumed author of New Zealand's 'Moral Foreign Policy' in favour of collective security and against aggression, he was a natural conservative who fundamentally disagreed with his masters except over external affairs. He worshipped Savage but had a famously poor relationship with Fraser.
- Alister McIntosh, his assistant
- Dr. W. B. Sutch, economist, adviser to Walter Nash, the member of the triumvirate most closely associated with finance and immigration

➤ Other

- The Right Rev. Cecil Arthur Cherrington, Bishop of Waikato, advocated the invitation of Japanese settlers to assist in the development of an 'under-populated' New Zealand in the late 1930s.

❖ South Africa

➤ Members of His Majesty's Government in the Union of South Africa

- General J. Barry M. Hertzog (former National Party wing of the United Party), Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, a natural autocrat whose determination was only stiffened by opposition, Hertzog's obsessive anxieties about the *Afrikaners*, coupled with his inability to empathise with the English, unintentionally undermined the fusion of the two communities that he sought to achieve.
- General Jan C. Smuts (former South Africa Party wing of the United Party), Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Justice, as passionate about 'Fusion' as Hertzog, Smuts had the difficult task of trying to mitigate the most insensitive of Hertzog's impositions on the English while striving to convince his increasingly sceptical followers that the benefits of co-operation still outweighed the disadvantages. That his relative success to date in this latter task only convinced Hertzog and his followers that Smuts would always deliver the English for them, simply rendered the prime minister more intransigent, thereby worsening Smuts's position.
- Oswald Pirow (former National Party wing of the United Party), Minister of Defence and Railways, the son of a German missionary, Pirow would attempt to use this connection to pull off a spectacular diplomatic coup when visiting Europe in November 1938, possibly with a view to establishing himself as the obvious successor to the two aging generals who presided over the United Party.
- Nicolaas Havenga (former National Party wing of the United Party), Minister of Finance, displayed little interest in external affairs except to dutifully support Hertzog's position to others.

➤ Members of Parliament

- Dr. Daniel Malan ('Purified' National Party), Leader of the main opposition party, Malan had defected from Hertzog's National Party when the latter had merged with Smuts's South Africa Party. Hertzog bitterly resented this challenge to his status as 'the Father of Afrikanerdom.' This led him to obsess about how any measure would play with the purified nationalists whose support he had lost, rather than with the English supporters he had gained, as a result of the merger, which tactless behaviour tended to exacerbate tensions within the (not very) United Party.
- Colonel Charles Stallard (Dominion Party), had lost his seat and seen his party virtually wiped out in the April 1938 election. While this did not stop him indomitably asserting his position, realistically he had to wait for better times.

➤ Diplomatic Representatives

- Sir William Clark, British High Commissioner for South Africa and the Protectorates of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland, formerly British High Commissioner in Canada from 1928-34.
- Dr. Rudolph Leitner, German Consul-General